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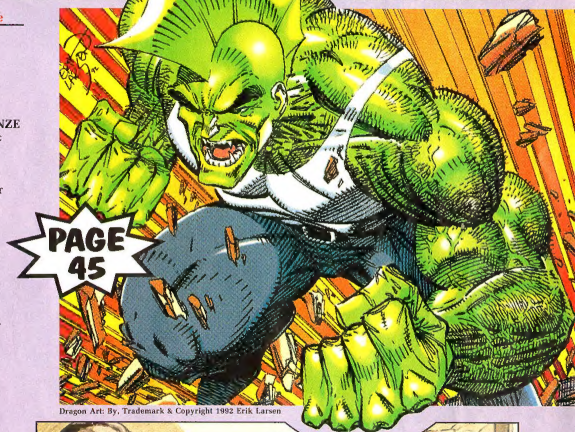

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COMICS SCENE RETURNS, sort of, in a new magazine, **COMICS SCENE YEARBOOK,** complete with classic stories (i.e. reprints) and lotsa *all-new* interviews, **on sale July 14, 1992.** And look for the *real* thing returning with **COMICS SCENE #29, on sale August 25, 1992.**

WORD BALLOONS

The Year of the Bat

His career begun as the Great Depression wore down, Batman remains, some 53 years later, one of the world's two best-known superheroes. Indeed, without him and Superman (and the many characters they influenced), there might be no comic book industry today.

Inspired by Zorro, the 1931 movie *The Bat Whispers* and the drawings of Leonardo Da Vinci, an 18-year-old artist named Bob Kane created The Batman (with an assist from writer Bill Finger). It was 1939, the Year of the Bat. Designed as a counterpart to National Comics' (now DC) one-year-old hit, Superman, Batman was also an immediate success.

A self-described creature of the night, Batman is a driven man, almost a vigilante. As a boy, his parents were murdered by a robber before his very eyes. He grew up swearing vengeance, training himself to battle crime in Gotham City. Now, as millionaire Bruce Wayne, he plays the role of a philanthropic playboy while adopting the guise of a bat to fight evil, the better to frighten criminals "who are a cowardly and superstitious lot."

By 1940, Batman had acquired a sidekick: Dick Grayson, Wayne's ward, who fought as Robin (his costume and name based on the Errol Flynn film *Adventures of Robin Hood*). Kane, Finger, artists Jerry Robinson and Dick Sprang, and others chronicled this dynamic duo's adventures in the pages of *Detective Comics*, *Batman* and later, *World's Finest Comics* (where Batman teams with Superman). They also starred in two 1940s movie serials.

And always, there were the villains, grotesque madmen who seemed to have stepped out of a freak show (and in some cases, had): That maniacal clown prince of crime, the Joker, Batman's arch-foe, responsible in 1990 for the murder of a subsequent Robin, Jason Todd...Harvey Dent, a former Gotham D.A. scarred by acid into Two-Face...Edward Nigma, whose every utterance puzzled as the Riddler...the Penguin, a man with a fanaticism most fowl...and perhaps most deadly of all, Selina Kyle, the Catwoman, a beautiful criminal only a Batman could love (and did).

Throughout the '50s, Batman and Robin fought these super-crooks as well as a legion of SF-inspired alien monsters, often amidst the trademark settings of the era—really big props (i.e. giant typewriters, refrigerators, etc.). The '60s brought an end to that sort of silliness and the beginning of the "camp" caped crusader as Adam West and Burt Ward starred in the smash TV series. It was a time of "Batmania," with all sorts of Hollywood celebrities (Milton Berle, Tallulah Bankhead, Sammy Davis Jr., etc.) clamoring to play guest star villains or even just stick their heads out of a window to cameo. A short-lived phenomenon, the series and a 1966 movie spin-off painted a popular if painful portrait of a comedic Batman.

In the comics throughout the '70s and '80s, realism was the order of the night. Under the stewardship of editor Julius Schwartz, Batman entered another golden age of heroics as a Gothic adventurer (under writer Denny O'Neil and artist Neal Adams) and a darkknight detective (from writer Steve Engelhart and artist Marshall Rogers). With O'Neil as editor, the comics became even more popular, culminating in *The Dark Knight Returns*, Frank Miller's redefinition of Batman as the grimmest vigilante of all.

That graphic novel (and Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons' Batman vs. Joker showcase *The Killing Joke*) helped inspire director Tim Burton's blockbuster 1989 Warner Bros. film starring Michael Keaton as Batman and Jack Nicholson as the Joker. The movie made the bat symbol a cultural icon, taking in some $230 million at the American box office. Licensing and overseas revenues pushed the total take to almost half-a-billion.

And now, it is once again the Year of the Bat. A new animated series, based upon the movies' grim, adult view of the hero, will premiere this fall on Fox. Bantam and Warner Books are issuing new Batman novels and paperback anthologies. DC Comics has two more ongoing titles, *Legends of the Dark Knight* and the new *Shadow of the Bat*, as well as countless graphic novels and specials. And there will be even more T-shirts, video games, action figures, toys, trading cards and collectibles.

The reason? Director Tim Burton and star Michael Keaton have reteamed as the darkknight detective faces love and death—i.e. Catwoman (Michelle Pfeiffer) and the Penguin (Danny DeVito)—in a new adventure. "Batmania" begins anew this very month as *Batman Returns*.

—David McDonnell/Editor

LETTERING

Personal replies are impossible. Other fans & advertisers may contact readers whose letters are printed here. To **avoid** this, mark your letter "Please Withhold My Address." Otherwise, we retain the option to publish it. Write:
COMICS SCENE
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...About eight years ago, I created a small, self-published comic book called *Fish Police*. This past February, CBS premiered a prime time animated show based on my book, created by Hanna-Barbera. The ultimate success story, right? *Hardly.*

I'm sure that hundreds, perhaps thousands, of writers have had their work changed, heavily revised, or just plain demolished for television or the movies. But I'm willing to bet those writers have at least had the satisfaction of knowing their material was actually *read* before the studios made

Suddenly, Clark knew he should have taken those "embarrassing static cling" commercials seriously.

their changes. I, however, can make no such claim.

My relationship with Hanna-Barbera was odd from the beginning. In fact, there was no relationship. David Kirschner, the studio president, told a reporter from my area that there wasn't one single element in my book that he could use in *his* show, and therefore found it unnecessary to have anyone from the company consult with me or to even say hello. And they never did. I was not even mentioned by name in the press kit. My book was simply described as "the British comic book." I am *not* British.

Fine. If that's the way Hollywood works, so be it. I learned a valuable lesson the hard way.

But why Jeanne Romano, a writer and producer of the show, felt she had to dismiss my comic as "fluff" in CS #26 is beyond me. When she described the book I worked on every day for seven years as "traditional superhero stuff," I was baffled. If she's going to insult me in a national publication, with a circulation higher than *Fish Police* could ever hope to have, you think she would have the decency to read the stuff first.

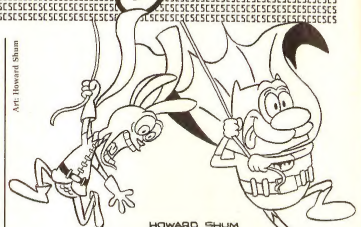
To call my book "traditional" is offensive. There has never been anything like it—it is unique in the best sense of the word. But to label it "superhero stuff" is not only insulting, it is absurd. There is not one single superhero in the entire series. Not one. And this is the *producer* of the show! I never had a chance!

I won't bother with my opinion of the show. I'll let the national ratings speak for themselves. But I do think it's sad that Jeanne Romano never bothered to read *Fish Police*. She might have enjoyed it.

Steve Moncuse
Creator, *Fish Police*

...First off, I would like to thank you for the article on *Ultraman, Towards The Future*. Although the series contains some nice miniatures and simple computer-generated FX, it has a ways to go in matching the original. I would assume all comments made by Gus Howard and Terry Larsen were based on the original *Ultraman*, and not the subsequent sequels, so I will limit my comments to the original 39 episodes as well.

The new series, though slick in style, lacks the original's heart and soul. Many people who may have caught an episode or clip here and there will for the most part dismiss *Ultraman* as men in rubber suits running around cardboard buildings beating each other up. However, if you take the time to watch certain episodes, there are quite a few jewels buried under what is perceived as a rough exterior.



THE NEW DYNAMIC DUO – BATSTIMPY AND REN

I don't see more of the humanity in the new incarnation that was in the original. Two examples from the 1966 series: Take episode #15, "Terror of the Cosmic Ray," in which Ultraman must battle Gavadon, a creature born from a drawing by a group of children. Ultraman must destroy the monster as it has become a threat to Earth, but realizing that it is a "pet" to the children, Ultraman appears to them in the night sky, explaining that each year on this day, the children can look into the sky and see Gavadon as a constellation among the stars.

In another episode, #35—"The Monster Graveyard," Ultraman must help the monster Seabozu, who fell to Earth from the Monster Graveyard in space, where Ultraman deposits the monsters he defeats. At the episode's end, Ultraman straps the monster to a rocket, and escorts it back to where it belongs. Quite a difference from the character Larsen describes as not caring at all, "cutting the monsters to pieces, sending javelins into their throats and ripping off limbs."

All in all though, it is unusual for a mainstream magazine to run *any* type of article on anything Japanese, so thank you again.

As for *Ultraman, Towards The Future*, it is more entertaining than most syndicated series (*Superboy, Tarzan, Super Force*). Also, since it is the closest we will see to Japanese fantasy in this country (until someone picks up *Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah* or Miramax gets off their butts and releases *Godzilla vs. Biollante*), it is a funny way to spend 30 minutes on a Sunday morning. However, no matter how popular it gets, you won't be seeing any additional episodes from the South Australia Film folks. But, hopefully, it will open the flood gates for some of the 400 other episodes contained in the Ultra-series.

Bob Johnson
Co-Editor, *Markalite*
Magazine of Japanese Fantasy
P.O. Box 6846
Oakland, CA 94603

...Lee Goldberg's article (CS #25) on the many versions of Ultraman was interesting, but I'm afraid he missed another Ultraman incarnation. Hanna-Barbera actually produced an animated TV movie pilot in 1987, in conjunction with Tsuburaya Productions, called *Ultraman! The Adventure Begins.*

The synopsis: An asteroid containing four Sorkin monsters crashes on Earth. This is detected by the Ultra Force, an intergalactic police force from the planet M-78. To protect the Earthlings, the Ultra Force merges into the bodies of three Air Force test pilots, Scott Masterson (voiced by Michael Lembeck), Chuck Gavin (Chad Everett) and Beth O'Brien (Adrienne Barbeau). When in trouble, they can transform themselves into super-powered Ultra People. Led by Walter Freeman (Stacy Keach, Sr.), the Ultra Force establishes headquarters at Mount Rushmore, after which they battle the monsters that threaten New Orleans, San Francisco, Denver and New York City.

Corrections to my own *Taz-Mania* episode guide in CS #22: "Woeful Work" is supposed to be "Woeful Wolf."

"Devil with Violet Dress On" and "Kidnapped Koala" had production problems, so they were *replaced* with two episodes originally intended for the show's second season. "Devil with Violet Dress On" and "Kidnapped Koala" will be seen in the series' second season. The replacements, first broadcast December 7, 1991:

"Comic Madness," written by Henry Gilroy and Art Vitello; directed by Keith Baxter. Hugh and Jean are distressed by Taz's hobby of collecting comic books.

"Blunders Never Cease," written by Bill Kopp; directed by Keith Baxter. Francis X. Bushlad tries Dr. Duckbreath's magic potions to enhance his strength, speed and size to catch the Tasmanian Devil—while the Devil is asleep.

The Fox network objected to Taz's father, Hugh, carrying a pipe because they don't want to encourage smoking among the viewers—even though the pipe was never smoked. So, Warners has reanimated segments to *remove* the pipe. Fox also doesn't want Taz spinning/smashing through rocks and trees because he's damaging the environment. That's "ecologically incorrect," so, no more busted trees.

Bob Miller
COMICS SCENE writer

...Wow, I never expected to create controversy. This is kind of new to me. I would like the chance to respond to Dan Alexander's letter (CS#26), though, and make a few clarifications, if I might.

Since I wrote the now-infamous letter (CS#22), I have come around on *Tale Spin*. In fact, I've added *all* the shows to my videotape collection. The animation is beautiful and the stories are well-written.

On *Darkwing Duck*, though, nothing has changed. I have watched 25 or 30 of the episodes (I don't know how many were made), but I still don't like it. Perhaps my phrase "freeze-animation" was a little rough. The phrase that comes to mind is actually "stilted." The animation isn't nearly as flowing and brightly colored as *Tale Spin* or *Tiny Toon Adventures*.

Ironic, isn't it, that in the very same issue my letter was published, there was an interview with *Darkwing* creator Tad Stones? In that interview he says, "I didn't want much detail in the backgrounds; I wanted sparse designs that highlighted the characters."

Unfortunately, the bland backgrounds detract from the characters, in my opinion, and the whole thing becomes unwatchable. I know many people who watch cartoons (but not for the animation) and are turned off by *Darkwing*'s animation. So, it works both ways. And, yes, I'll admit to a few chuckles from *Darkwing*.

Could you please *print* my address so anyone else who wants to carry on this debate could write directly to me? Thanks.

Augie De Blieck Jr.
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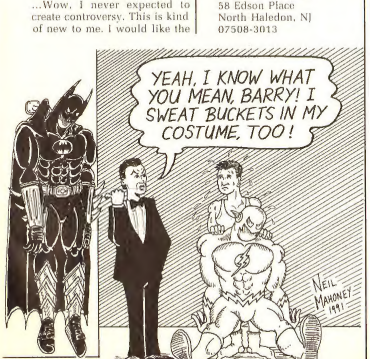
07508-3013



Art: Neil Mahoney

Art: Marc Crisafulli

...Although COMICS SCENE #25 contained a number of interesting articles (there's no surprise in that!), what prompted me to write was the editorial. Not for the first time, I found myself in complete agreement with what David McDonnell had to say (It's nice when the editor of a great magazine seems to be a kindred spirit). Though I read few of the *Classics Illustrated* series, I can identify with the way in which his reading progressed.

His thoughts on the subject of fans/investors were spot on. I saw many people buying comics for the purpose of profit when I worked at a comics shop. The satisfaction came from providing fans with comics that would be read for pleasure, not in supplying speculators with future resale material, though there are many people who were obviously working both sides of the street, something not mentioned. However, that isn't why I wrote. The point I wish to make concerns another aspect of our hobby, equally unsatisfactory and, I believe, potentially far more damaging to the industry. If there are "fans" out to make money out of comics and beggar the consequences, there are dealers of the same ilk, too. These dealers claim to offer the fans a service, when they are simply businessmen, nothing else. There's nothing wrong with being in business to earn a living, of course. What irks me is the dealers who regard the customer, the comics fan, as a sheep to be fleeced, a nuisance to be endured. I have heard fans described as scum simply because they "dared" to look at another dealers' advertisement, as "traitors" because they didn't spend enough money. Or was that the other way around? There are a number of this type of dealer around, looking at fans as just cash on the hoof. They're making it more and more difficult for dealers who are concerned with comics as a medium as well as a living. There is a danger of alienating people, of driving away new readers and collectors.

Dale Cole
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...CS #24 was a great issue. Finally, a publication that isn't saturated with all this *X-Men* nonsense! Man, talk about overkill!

I'm so glad you spotlighted the very exciting goings-on in the Marv Wolfman and *Titans*-related series. *The Titans*, to me, is *the* comeback story of the decade so far. The X-stuff sold because it was so commercially oriented, but lacks quality, especially in the story-telling department. Marv Wolfman is currently writing the best scripts of his career, and it was enthralling reading this interview to see the springboards for all those great concepts. Until early 1991, I was a Wolfman detractor. But now, I am once again in his fanbox. I hope readers catch on *now* to the great things that are in store from Wolfman and editor Jonathan Peterson.

Chris Khalaf
PO Box 925142
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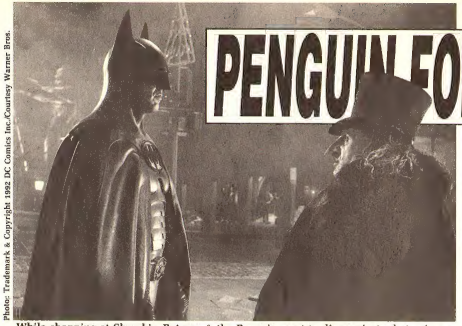
PENGUIN FOR MAYOR!?



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While shopping at Shreck's, Batman & the Penguin meet to discuss just what prizes winners will get—and whose crew jacket.

As *Batman Returns*, it's to a Gotham City gone mad. After all, the Penguin, of all people, is running for Mayor.

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Here's what you do: Send *one* postcard only (absolutely *no* envelopes, please) with your carefully printed name and address (street/city/zip code) to Mayor, c/o COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Avenue South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016. Neatness counts. Illegible addresses must be disqualified. Only one entry per person. *Any and all* multiple entries will be discarded. All decisions of the judges are *final*.

This contest is open to all, except employees (and freelancers) of Time Warner, the Penguin, the Wayne Foundation, Gotham City and the STARLOG GROUP and their affiliates, subsidiaries, suppliers and ad agencies. No purchase necessary. Void where prohibited by law.

All entries must be received in the COMICS SCENE offices no later than July 17, 1992. A random postcard drawing will be conducted thereafter, with prizes sent out as available. Please note: No responsibility is assumed for any lost, misdirected or late entries and any lost, misdirected or damaged-in-mail prizes.

Through the courtesy of Warner Bros., those prizes are:

First Prize (1): An official *Batman Returns* crew jacket (size XL).

Second Prize (8): An authentic Penguin for Mayor poster, a prop actually used in the film.

Third Prize: (11): An official *Batman Returns* set of movie posters (*all* of the posters created for this theatrical release).

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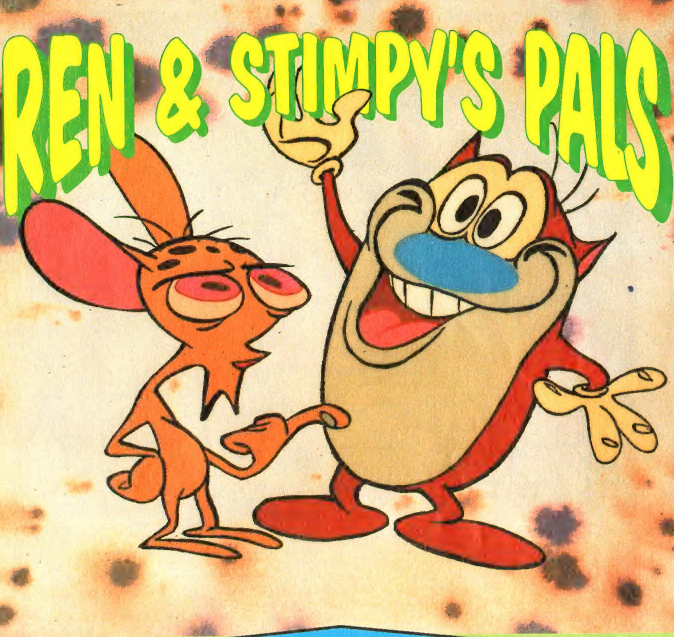
REN & STIMPY'S PALS



Thanks to SPUMCO, that cartoon Chihuahua & his feline friend are animation's newest stars.

By PAM & DOUG MURRAY

Move over, Bart Simpson! Subversive upstarts *Ren and Stimpy* are here. For those not already addicted to this cutting-edge bulldozer of a cartoon, it features an emaciated Chihuahua with veiny-covered bulging eyes (Ren Hoek), and a Larry Fine-inspired blob of a cat named Stimpy, whose loyalty to his friend is exceeded only by his gullibility.

This progressive new show, created by John Kricfalusi, takes all that's good in the classic cartoons of the '40s and '50s to the furthest, most mutated extreme—and then adds a dash of Dr. Seuss. It's the work of a brand new studio—SPUMCO!

"SPUMCO," muses Bob Camp, storyboard artist and writer. "I made that word up!" He looks at his companion, fellow SPUMCO writer and artist Jim Smith, and shrugs, smiling sheepishly. "Well, *maybe* it was John Kricfalusi and I together." He sits back, crossing his legs. "There *is* a story behind it. We took the name from Raymond Spum, the inventor of animation.

"In the 1850s, Spum was in prison, breaking rocks and getting bored out of his skull. To fight the boredom, he started drawing this little chihuahua character on the rocks. He then would juggle them while the other inmates watched, blinking their eyes real fast to give it the illusion of movement." Camp pauses in his deadpan delivery. "That's where animation *really* came from. Later, Raymond gave a young upstart named Walter Disney his first job—and ended up firing him because he was a deadbeat."

Camp's expression turns sad. "Spum disappeared into obscurity in the '30s—but that wasn't enough for Walt. He had never forgiven the old man for firing him, and when he became rich and powerful, Walt did everything he could to wipe Raymond's name out of the history books. That's

Writer/artist Jim Smith has a great deal to say about *Ren and Stimpy*, but wants the cartoons to "speak for themselves."

why the average fan has never heard of him." Camp lights up in a wicked smile. "When we—John, Jim, a few others and I—formed our own studio, we decided to call it SPUMCO in an attempt to keep the name of Raymond Spum alive."

Ren and Stimpy premiered on Nickelodeon, the "Channel for Kids." Few noticed. However, when MTV picked it up a few months later, it suddenly hit—big-time!

"Yeah!" chortles Camp. "That sort of pisses Nickelodeon off, 'cause *they* paid for it—it came out of *their* budget, not MTV's! Actually, our whole existence is due to Vanessa Coffey, executive producer for Nickelodeon. She's the one who goes to bat for us and fights to get all the silly, weird jokes in there. She stands between us and the guys in the suits."

"We don't like the guys in suits!" interjects Jim Smith.

"Well," Camp points out, "they do serve a purpose—after all, Nickelodeon's target market *is* 10-12-year-olds—but *we're* not aiming the stuff at little kids. *Ren and Stimpy* is for *everybody*, although kids *do* love it. There are a couple of moms who don't like it, but they're the type who don't like anything." He motions to Smith, who grins and nods. "You see, our problem is that we're *never* satisfied. We want to *really* push the envelope—disembowelment gags and all. Of course, we have to fight for what we get—just like any studio."

Talent doesn't suddenly appear full-blown, and both Camp and Smith are proof of that, having worked for years in both animation and the comics scene.

"I started working for Marvel Comics in 1981," notes Camp. "I did movie parodies for a *Mad* magazine rip-off called *Crazy* that ran for a couple of years. When that dried up, I worked on their comics, *Conan* mostly. I did a lot of inking, because I had decided that it wasn't worth the aggravation of pencilling the stuff. As it turned out, I inked a lot of comic books over the next few years!"

Smith grins, revealing, "I came from a different direction. I had done a lot of music for cartoons—in fact, I was a musician *before* I came into animation. I *did* do a little bit of comic book art, and I dabbled in watercolor painting and the like. I met John Kricfalusi while the two of us were working for Ralph Bakshi on the [Rolling Stones'] 'Harlem Shuffle' video. John was directing the animation, and I came in to do background design—I've been working with him ever since."

"A friend got me a job at Rankin-Bass in New York," Camp explains. "I worked there for a few years. It was a *very* small studio; me and one other guy were the *whole* art department. After that, I heard about a job in California, at DIC, so I moved there. I worked on *Ghostbusters* for a while, then met up with John Kricfalusi, who's the boss here—he was just starting to work on *Beany & Cecil* [CS #5].

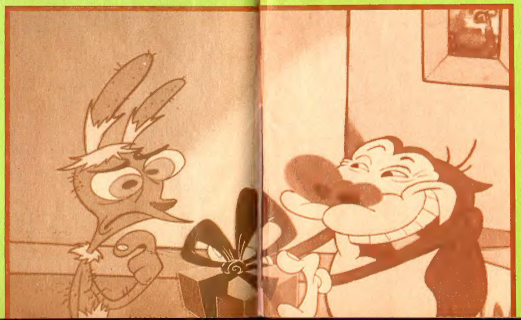
"We were working on the same floor. He was just down the hall. I would walk by, see guys doing all these funny drawings and think, 'Shit! Why am I working on this crud?' I liked *his* material a whole lot better. It was a chance to learn how to draw in a more cartoony fashion. Up until then, my drawing style went back and forth between superhero and *Mad* magazine styles; this was a chance to expand my abilities, to do some funny stuff! I hired on as a storyboard artist, working directly for John."

"That turned out to be a bad experience all the way around," Camp continues, making a face. "One day, they just fired us all. 'Put down your pencils; you don't work here anymore!' Guess we made 'em mad because we put *jokes* in their cartoons. They had some preconceived notion that cartoons were only for two-year-olds."

With the nucleus of a team established, Kricfalusi began work on a new project—a project grounded deep in the roots of classical comedy.

Jim Smith leans forward: "We all like the old Warner Bros. cartoons, the ones by Tex Avery, Bob Clampett, Chuck Jones—then, of course, the Three Stooges."

Bob Camp breaks in: "Basically, everywhere any one of us has ever worked, we've ended up doing stupid shows for stupid people." He takes a deep breath. "We weren't having any fun, and we always thought it was supposed to *be* fun. We're supposed to laugh at what we do—you know, *enjoy ourselves!* But it didn't work that way—we had all become unemployable because of our attitudes—we had become a bunch of sour bastards! So, we all got together, formed SPUMCO and did *Ren and Stimpy*."



"Robin Hoek" represents yet another classic tale gone SPUMCO.

All Ren & Stimpy Art: Copyright 1992 Nickelodeon

Ren, in another nod to the absent Mr. Spum, is a Chihuahua—but one with a very distinctive voice—supplied by Kricfalusi.

Bob Camp grins, then does an imitation of Peter Lorre. "You fat, bloated i-diot!" He laughs. "Yeah, it's Peter Lorre, all right. We tried other voices, but it always came back to Lorre. He has the best, weaseliest little-evil-guy voice ever. Peter Lorre is God! You *can't* beat his stuff!"

Stimpy the Cat, his sidekick, is a living punching bag—just like the person his voice was based upon.

Camp grins again. "Yep, Stimpy sounds a lot like Larry Fine—that's because Stimpy *is* Larry Fine. Actually, we snuck out to where Larry is buried, dug up his voice box, hooked it up to a bellows and—no, Billy West does Stimpy's voice. He has the wonderful distinction of being the only human on Earth who can do Larry Fine."

But...Larry Fine?

"Well, when you have a goofy character, everybody expects," Camp falls into another imitation—Goofy this time—"Hyuck! Hyuck!" He drops back into normal voice. "We didn't want that. Larry Fine *also* had a really stupid-sounding voice, but *he* was a comic genius. Everybody talks about Moe, Curly and Shemp, but what about Larry? He could take a *punch*! He wrote about being the third man out, and about how they were always smacking him around, beating and abusing him."

Smith agrees. "Larry is the greatest Stooge of them all! If you watch the Three Stooges, you've gotta look at Larry—those cool expressions, and he *did* take a lot of punishment."

Ren learns the hard way that Stimpy's gifts are real hair razors.

"Like Stimpy!" Camp throws in. "Actually, Stimpy has only one nerve ending in his whole body, and that ending is overworked, it being involved with eating and shitting. You could beat up on him all day and he'll just think that it's affection. If you ever freeze-frame the show, you'll notice there's always a slight look of anticipation right before he gets smacked—a little 'Oh Joy!' in his eyes!"

Reviewers have referred to *Ren and Stimpy* as "Tex Avery on *really* heavy drugs," a concept that Camp and Smith *don't* accept.

"People see a take and think, 'Oh. Tex Avery,' " Camp sighs. "It's like people hearing classical music and saying, 'Oh. It's Beethoven.' They don't have a full range of reference as to different styles of cartooning. People could look at it and say, 'Hey! That's Bob Clampett!' because it's funny. Or they could say, 'Hey! That's Chuck Jones!' because there's a sort of form to it, but our show really is a culmination of all that was *ever* good in cartoons taken a step further. It's different, because our motives are different. We're trying to make cartoons that make *us* laugh! We *are* gonna sell toys—but that's *not* why we made the cartoon.

"We're doing the old Disney thing—we have a school, and any time anybody comes up with a new theory, we discuss it, write it up, put it in the computers and put out memos. We have layout classes, storyboard seminars, the whole thing."

Still, one has to wonder if the animation could be smoother, fuller.

Camp bristles: "Well, this *is* TV! We've got to work within TV budgets and schedules. Quite frankly, I don't care if it's full animation or not—I mean, is it important if it moves smooth? Disney can do smooth animation, right? But is their stuff *funny*? No siree, Bob!!"

Down in the mouth? Let Stimpy's Happy Helmet work for you as it does for Ren.

Ren and Stimpy has become a gigantic hit, but all the uproar has come from a mere six episodes. Twenty more segments went into production in March, scheduled to debut in mid-August.

"We're gonna have some really cool shows this year!" Camp announces. "In fact, this year is gonna make last year look like *Tiny Toons*! Sorry. Well, maybe not. I have no qualms at all about anybody knowing that I used to work there and I'm glad I don't anymore!" He settles back into his chair. "Anyway, we're gonna have a really cool show called 'Ren's Brain.' Stimpy is a brain surgeon, right?" He turns to Jim Smith. "Say right."

Smith, shaking his head: "Right."

Camp continues, "He's tired of working on the same old brains he gets out of the dumpster out back of the hospital. He's really looking for a perfect brain. One night, he's sitting at home in bed, distressed because he can't find it. Ren's asleep next to him, his head backlit, and Stimpy sees, pulsating in Ren's cranium, the perfect brain! He thinks, 'Oh, Ren won't mind!' and takes Ren's brain out and operates on him while Ren's asleep. It's full of real cool brain jokes—it'll be a classic.

Happy, happy, joy, joy! ***Ren and Stimpy*'s popularity continues to grow on Nickelodeon and MTV.**

"There's another cool one where Stimpy joins an all-girl band called the 'Cellulettes,' and they do a dance and show their thighs and wink their leg divots at people and do a song about how it's cool to have cellulite—skinny girls are out. And in 'Monkey See, Monkey Don't,' Ren and Stimpy get jobs as monkeys in a zoo."

Like many creative people, Camp and Smith are never quite satisfied with their work, but they do have favorite episodes, remembered bits.

Smith grins, "Well, there *is* the scene in 'Space Madness,' when Ren is daydreaming in the bathtub, while the water floats up and out of the tub. I laid all of that out. The other stuff, him at the console thinking, and doing the captain's log—I helped write *all* of it—even though I didn't get a screen credit. It was actually written by John, Jim Gomez and me."

He thinks for a minute. "Hey! I guess I'll get credit now! Justice at last! I would like to thank my mom."

Bob Camp breaks in, "*All* the ones I wrote are my faves!" He makes a face at Smith. "Nyah! Nyah! And there are more to come! I'm working on one now that's pretty cool called 'Out West.' Ren and Stimpy are desperadoes in the West. There's a really stupid sheriff and deputy in it—I mean, *really* stupid! We are [story-] boarding that right now. Jim's doing one called 'Big Brother,' where Ren wants to be a big brother, so they go to big brother headquarters—that's a good one too."

Smith agrees. "Yeah, Ren adopts a child so he can be his big brother. It turns out that the child he adopts is 6-foot-4, 300 pounds; his name is Kowalski. He has been in prison for crimes against humanity—but he's only seven years old. He looks like he's 36, though. He's a giant, a giant killer, and Ren has to be a *big* brother to him, and babysit him."

Camp grins evilly. "Sure, he will!"

"And all the comedy comes out of that," Smith finishes.

Of course, with success comes media exposure, notoriety—and merchandise! Camp grins at the idea. "Oh, yeah! We're gonna do great stuff! Enema bags, butt plugs." He grins ruefully. "Actually, they have been kind of slow getting merchandise going, because they want *us* to come up with it—we want really stupid toys, not your regular *G.I. Joe* crap. We want toys that leak on you and explode in your face—*real* fun stuff!"

But, of course, there is always a question of control.

Camp nods. "Nick *does* own the show, although we get a piece of the adjusted gross. Nick is God. They pay for everything. If the big one hits Manhattan, we'll be out of luck. I'm kidding. They've been very good to us; they allow us to do the show. I mean, who else would have let us do that?

"John was all over this town, and he's not new in the business. He paid his dues a thousand times—and yet, everyone in town looked at him as if he were nuts!! He would come into a place, screaming and thrusting his groin out and slamming his head into the wall—you know, being really funny.

"Of course, when you're used to boring people coming in and talking warmth and morals when they pitch cartoons, you end up without a clue

(continued on page 60)

Writer Jeff Lang takes a new path to adventure. Who's along for the ride?

ROADWAYS

By T.L. JOHNS

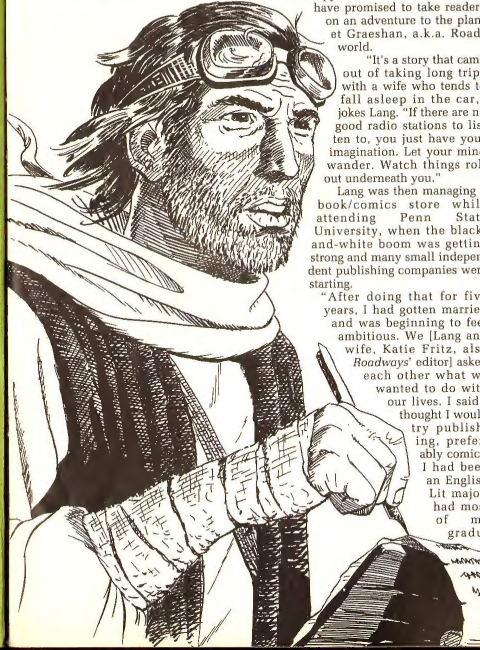
Roads figure prominently in cultures all over the world. In American culture alone, there are tributes to roads in the form of poems, songs, stories, even movies.

"All good adventures begin with a road," says Jeff Lang, creator of *Roadways*, Comic Zone's new three-issue black-and-white mini-series beginning in July. Lang, penciller Ted Slampyak and inker Steven Lieber have promised to take readers on an adventure to the planet Graeshan, a.k.a. Roadworld.

"It's a story that came out of taking long trips with a wife who tends to fall asleep in the car," jokes Lang. "If there are no good radio stations to listen to, you just have your imagination. Let your mind wander. Watch things roll out underneath you."

Lang was then managing a book/comics store while attending Penn State University, when the black-and-white boom was getting strong and many small independent publishing companies were starting.

"After doing that for five years, I had gotten married and was beginning to feel ambitious. We [Lang and wife, Katie Fritz, also *Roadways*' editor] asked each other what we wanted to do with our lives. I said I thought I would try publishing, preferably comics. I had been an English Lit major, had most of my graduate degree done and had spent a lot of my graduate work on mythology—specifically on American mythology—that is, comic books. So, I sent Comico a letter and asked if they had any job they thought I could do. To my amazement, I got a letter back a month later saying, 'Yes, we *do* have a job; can you come up and interview?' I worked there for about a year doing a variety of things; I started out writing ads, acting as a liaison to distributors, acting as submissions editor."



Shortly after, Comico experienced financial difficulties, Lang decided to move on. He settled in with another (non-comics) publisher, and later wrote for *Amazing Heroes* and tried to sell story proposals to other publishers. His friend, DC editor Michael Eury, revealed the facts of comics life.

"Mike nicely explained that I had no experience and DC doesn't hire people without experience. So, I thought, fine, I'll find some place to sell my work. I did some short stories and sent them to Gary Reed at Caliber Press. He liked them and asked if I had an artist. That's when I first got in touch with Mike Allred. Mike said he would draw them, but didn't have time to ink them. I asked him how he felt about Bernie Mireault's work and he said, 'I love Bernie!' That's how we all came together. And that's how *Creatures of the Id* came about."

Lang then worked on other projects, including *Looney Tunes*.

"I loved doing it. Daffy Duck is my role model, I've based my life on his teachings," Lang says with mock sincerity. "Really, it's a lot of fun and a thrill for me. To write Bugs Bunny dialogue is a dream come true!"

Now, Lang's attention is focused on *Roadways*, a work of eclectic origin. Lang counts J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy adventure epic *The Hobbit* and the Talking Heads' song "Road to Nowhere" among his inspirations. But *Roadways*' true beginnings were ignited by one of Lang's Penn State buddies.

"The interaction between human beings as organisms and their environment is very precarious," notes Lang.

"The story really came about when a friend and I were in college. We played a role-playing game that he made up. He came up with some really incredible ideas, the least of which was that there was this interdimensional road that connected all of these worlds. After we left college, I said to him, 'Fred [or rather, Dr. Fred Senese, who now works for NASA as a chemist and is "the smartest guy" Lang knows], do you mind if I try and write stories about this, because you're probably never going to do anything with it again.'

"What would happen if you took a simple culture with a simple environment—and when I mean simple, I mean on this world, you have a well-balanced environment—and it has a catastrophic event occur, the intrusion of this energy field, the road we're talking about. It's catastrophic in the way that it effects everything around it. Essentially, what it does is suck all of the energy in the entire ecosphere into itself, so that all of the world's energy is being pulled towards this road. The only place where you can grow food and [or] have animals is on this one long strip of land along the road. The road actually has a gateway, sort of like an on-ramp, that connects to Earth and to the interdimensional road, which eventually leads to the Roadworld, Graeshan.

"The poem in *The Hobbit* made me think that every good adventure story begins with a road. Every good adventure story I've ever read has somebody who wants to see something somewhere else. In this case, that's John Neville, who has spent his entire life living in one place. Through this one event, he finally goes some place and he thinks, 'I wonder what's going on?' That step takes you to your next step and the next, until before you know it, you're having an adventure!"

***Roadways* creator Jeff Lang takes the on-ramp to his Roadworld, Graeshan.**

Although the story has environmental overtones, Lang promises that he's not just preaching. "It's not going to be a heavy-handed thing. It will stay in the background.

"The interaction between human beings as organisms and their environment is very precarious," notes Lang. "When these events occur, whether it's someone manipulating them to their own end or if they're naturally occurring events, it's people's reactions that determine what happens next. This particular culture took the easy way out. Instead of trying to find a solution to the problem, they opted for having someone come along and say, 'Here, this is what we'll do and this will make everything better.' And everyone says, 'Oh, you seem to know what you're doing; we'll do anything you say,' which I think politically is one of the most dangerous situations you can put yourself into. People have a natural inclination *not* to think, to *let* someone else do it."

Lang promises a cast of colorful characters: The reluctant hero, John Neville; his missing lab assistant, Emily, the adventuresome Graetwist and the crazy Solon.

"John Neville is a lot like Fred [Senese]. John is an amalgamation of several people, Fred being major among them. John's also a little bit like me, especially where he's very confused. He spends most of his time doing what anyone thrust into this situation would do, asking, 'What the hell is going on here?' " Lang laughs.

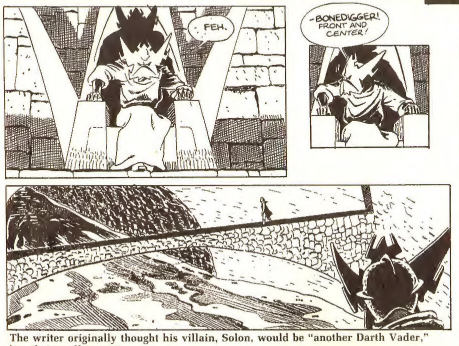
"Emily's based largely on my wife, which means she's the second smartest person I know and the *one* person I would trust leading me anywhere. Emily has had a really tough life and she probably should have folded a long time ago. She's scarred emotionally. Neville falls for her right away. He has such a crush on her, and she's just oblivious to him.

"She's from Roadworld, and for a long time, she was a favorite of Solon's [the ruler of Graeshan]. Her relationship with Solon is pretty much the core of the second issue—why she's doing what she's doing and why she didn't do it sooner. For some time, she had very high rank in this society, and then she found out what Solon was really attempting to do and she had to do something about it.

"Emily figures out how to get through one of the gates on the planet. Imagine there's this huge, silver river, and at either end, there's a hole disappearing into nothing. One of the river's ends is under the city that Solon has built. The other end is so far from everything else that few people are willing to go out there. Emily manages to get there and get through it. On the other side is Earth."

The villain of the piece is, of course, Solon. "He's from Earth. Because Solon has traveled over this interdimensional border, he has some limited control over the road. He can do things they can't and he's treated with a great deal of respect.

"At first, I thought Solon was going to be another Darth Vader, but it wasn't long before he showed another side. He's really nuts," Lang admits with deadpan austerity. "He's completely out of his mind. His second-in-command, Bonedigger, runs things. Solon wants to open up his gateway so that he can go to any dimension whenever he wants. He got from Earth to Roadworld by accident, but he has convinced himself that it was an incredible achievement."



The writer originally thought his villain, Solon, would be "another Darth Vader," but "he's really nuts."

Graetwist, Lang's homage to the Grandmaster of Fantasy, Fritz Leiber [STARLOG #159], "is the ultimate confident person. He thinks that he always knows what's going on. Most of the time, he does figure out what he's doing. One of my favorite sequences is when he gets shot with an arrow in the back. Instead of saying something like, 'Oh, my God, I've been shot,' he's laying on the ground going, 'Jesus, I hate when this happens,' because it happens to him all the time. He knows much more about how this whole interdimensional travel thing works than anybody else, because he's an interdimensional traveler. Graetwist is probably the story's most amoral person. There are people who are just out-and-out evil, but Graetwist is out for himself."

After completing the written part of his work, Lang faced the next challenge—finding an artist to bring his world to life.

"If you work for DC or Marvel, they say, 'You're going to work with so-and-so.' But with independent publishers, you must find your own artists. I was lucky enough to meet Ted (Slampyak). We met over a couple different conventions," Lang stops and takes on a confessional tone. "Well, the truth is Ted and my wife were flirting. After the convention, she asked, 'Why don't you ask Ted if he'll do it?' I thought Ted was more interested in doing *Jazz Age* than a fantasy adventure. But we took him out to dinner, explained the whole thing and he said sure.

"My favorite part of the process is to think of scenes, interactions between people, and write those down. Let's face it: With an adventure, you have certain prescribed events. You have the set-up, you have X, Y and Z events and then the wrap-up. It's not complicated. The fun is doing the variations on it. You must have a balance between character and action. There's nothing I hate more than a comic book that's all one or the other—32 pages of people standing around talking to each other is excruciating. Those that are all action get boring after a while."

While *Roadways* mixes several genres, Lang considers it a "fantasy adventure," heavy on the adventure, with what he hopes will be a broad appeal to both young and mature readers.

Says Lang, "The best comics I've ever read use the medium to *do* something—evoke an emotion, describe an event, delineate a character trait—that you cannot do in any other medium.

All Roadways Characters & Art: Copyright 1992 Jeffrey Lang/Courtesy Comics Zone

You'd be a reluctant hero too if you were in Neville's shoes right about now.

For example, when Alan Moore was writing *Swamp Thing*, there was an issue where Alec had pretty much given up on the world; he had rooted himself into the green and wasn't moving for anything. Woodrue [the Floronic Man] was tearing up the town and Abby had to go get Alec. She was running through the woods with the feeling that something's wrong, that the vines were reaching out for her. Abby's feeling that she's crazy, but she's not; they really are after her. There's a point in the story where she's starting to crack and she cries out for Alec—and there's that great Steve Bissette/John Totleben page where Swamp Thing tears himself up out of where he's rooted—and you can't do that in *any* other medium. The way they broke down the slices of time, it was incredible. You can't even do that in film.

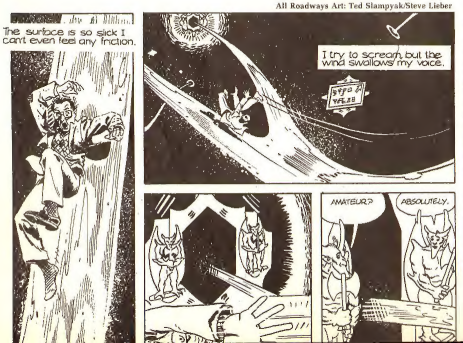
"And you're not just playing with time, you're playing with space. There's the arrangement of objects on a page, which you also can't do on film. I really appreciate looking at something by someone who has tried to manipulate the medium to use it in these ways."

Lang admits to having many stories of "the road," but he's waiting to see how many readers come along for the ride.

"I think I've hit every note I wanted to hit in this story. Steve and I started talking about a sequel about six months ago. I talked to a DC editor at a convention, and out of that, we started something called *Holly Lorus*, that could be tied into *Roadways*. She would work for the organization that maintains the road's integrity and she has, through a series of events, been deposited on Earth. So, we're working in reverse from what we were doing with *Roadways*. Eventually, what I would like to do is to take the characters from *Roadways* and *Holly Lorus*, and wrap it up into one big story.

"This is why the series is called *Roadways* and not *John Neville on Another Planet*. It's about the fact that these people are on this road. But who are they and what do they do? These are the questions I would like to answer in the future," confides Jeff Lang. "And I hope to see it happen."

All Roadways Art: Ted Slampyak/Steve Lieber



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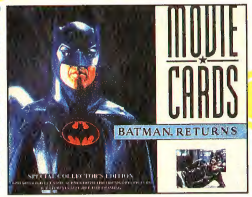

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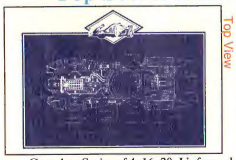
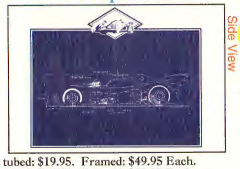

Top View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THE MAN BEHIND DOC SAVAGE

Lester Dent, the cowboy with five typewriters, had the adventures of a lifetime, in fiction & fact.

By CAL TINNEY

Art: Walter M. Baumhofer

In June 1945, newspaperman Cal Tinney interviewed his friend Lester Dent, the writer behind Street & Smith's Doc Savage Magazine *(and author of most of the 181 novels published therein). Tinney produced this lengthy profile of Dent, which was intended for magazine publication. Ultimately, it was never published anywhere.*

All Pulp Covers & Dent Photos: Courtesy Will Murray/Norma Dent

Meet the man behind Doc Savage, heroic Lester Dent.

Today, in preparing this manuscript for its publication debut in COMICS SCENE, the editors decided to preserve its brash excitement and stylistic eccentricities, presenting the article in much the same way readers would have seen it had it actually appeared 47 years ago.

Thus, it's still in present tense—with Dent and his father, both now long dead, noted here as living...with off-hand, then-contemporary references to individuals (Pat Hurley, Death Valley Scotty), events (Bank Holiday 1933) and products (a Packard automobile) now long-forgotten...and with most of Dent's apparent "tall tale" exaggeration about his life still intact.

Art: Walter M. Baumhofer

According to Dent, Doc is a combination of Sherlock Holmes, detective Craig Kennedy, Tarzan and Abraham Lincoln.

At the time of its writing, Tinney was a newspaper columnist, radio commentator and writer of NBC's Pistol Pete Rice, *a radio show based on Street & Smith's Western pulp character.*

COMICS SCENE is indebted to pulp historian Will Murray and Cal Tinney's attorney for their assistance in publishing this rare interview.

You can never tell how a cowboy will wind up. He may wind up on the screen the way Tom Mix did, or as Ambassador to China the way Pat Hurley did, or as a champion word-wrangler the way Wyoming-raised Lester Dent did.

Meet Les. All six-foot-two of him.

And don't expect him to rope a calf on the White House lawn. He hasn't roped any cattle in years now, though he still raises a few, and his 72-year-old dad still hopes to get stocky Les away from the typewriters and the production of blood-and-thunder literature long enough someday to help brand the steers. Yes, typewriters (plural)—for Les, like any good Wyoming cowboy, has a string of mounts to choose from when he goes to saddle up. Instead of one typewriter, he has a whole Remuda of them. He has *five* typewriters. And while one is working, four are always resting.

Resting? Well, resting—with their saddles on. You can't turn to a one of 'em but what it has a sheet of paper in it, with writing on it—writing that's part of another adventure story.

Maybe they'll never say, "When better stories are written, Dent will write them," but they do say, "When *more* stories are written, Dent will write them." But Lester, at 40, doesn't write as much as he used to write. Now that his once-black hair is turning grey behind his high hairline, he has settled down to writing only 100,000 words a month. He has almost retired now. He isn't pulling out all the stops and spewing forth 100,000 words *a week* the way he did in the old days. Otherwise, he might not have time for wild game hunting.

Tanned, fidgety, 222-pound Dent is the only man in the world who has written nine 60,000-word novels in six weeks, and then had the heroine walk up and start talking to him.

"I remember it just as if it were yesterday," Dent declares, scratching the small, reddish mustache on his upper lip. "I was sitting alone, at my typewriter, writing a boy and girl sequence. Boy and girl meet, and they spat, and they reunite, stuff. I always visualize my characters somewhat, and suddenly I noticed dark hair on the girl's leg; it showed through her sheer hose. I made a mental note that I had better have her shave her leg.

Art: Robert G. Harris

Dent's Savage gadgets predate many actual inventions. "We just anticipated the scientists; that's all," he says.

Then, I noticed that the hero's shoelaces were tied in a kind of knot that I didn't know how to tie. I had just decided that was curious when the girl and boy turned and started talking to me. The hero asked me if I had noticed where he had put his hat down, and the girl told me no, she could stand up, when I offered her a chair. They were there; they were *real*. They were flesh and blood. It took just a moment to realize what had happened, shut that typewriter and get the hell out of there.

"Six weeks in Florida and I was all right again."

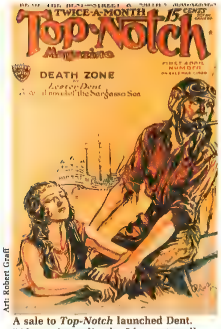
Art: Robert G. Harris

"I've never said Doc could jump over the Empire State Building the way Superman can," Dent protests.

Dent's most famous brainchild is *Doc Savage*, the monthly pulp magazine which he writes under the pseudonym of Kenneth Robeson. Dent gets madder than a Wyoming bobcat every time he sees a copy of the magazine on the newsstands. Sure, *Doc Savage* is bringing him in more money than the income-tax collector can shake another form at. And it's the bestselling magazine in the detective-adventure field. Overseas, soldiers bored with killing the enemy read *Doc Savage* for excitement. Even so, the sight of an issue makes Dent's blue eyes glow in anger. Why? Because when you turn to the table of

Art: Walter M. Baumhofer

"Never have your hero do anything that you wouldn't like to do yourself."



Art: Robert Graff

A sale to *Top-Notch* launched Dent. "Almost immediately, I began to sell practically everything I wrote."

contents, the name "Kenneth Robeson" is there instead of "Lester Dent."

It's the publisher's idea to bring the book out under a house name like that," Dent raves. "I'm *against* it. I believe a writer does much better work under his own name."

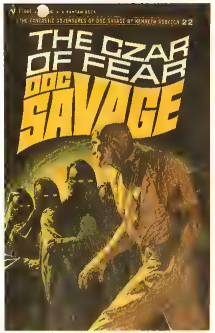
Doc Savage, in case you don't know it, was the forerunner of all this deluge of supermen in the comic pages and elsewhere. Doc, as originally conceived and launched by Dent a dozen years ago, was a brilliant, strapping, six-foot-four-inch-tall super-American who could do anything. Born on Bank Holiday, 1933, in *The Man of Bronze*, he walked on air, stopped trains with will power and personally chastised a whole army that was misbehaving. As he was born on Bank Holiday, you might ask, "Why didn't Doc stop the Depression?" Well, he did—for Dent.

The magazine clicked so much that within six months, it had 27 imitators. Circulation climbed to a phenomenal figure for a pulp magazine. Doc went on the radio, out came a comic that sold more, even, than the magazine, and *Doc Savage* began being published in nine foreign languages.

Street and Smith, the publishers, were surprised. So was the Wyoming-raised creator himself. "I didn't realize how many people wanted to be supermen," he says. "It's more clear to me now. A man comes in from driving a taxi all day to find his wife threatening to throw him out on his ear for not bringing home more tips to turn over to her. Naturally, he wants to be a Superman. Or a barber who had to vegetate in his shop all day, don't you reckon he yearns for a chance to get out and re-order the life of whole continents? Doc is the what-I-would-like-to-be dream of everybody, including me."

Doc Savage first entered the comics scene with Street & Smith's own line in 1940, seeing action decades later at Gold Key, Marvel, DC and Millennium.

Spider, Sahara. Cargo. Art: Bob Larkin/Reeves Art: James Bama



Cast Art: James Bama

Fans need not fear Doc's end. COMICS SCENE's Will Murray is spinning new Bantam paperback yarns, based on unused Dent material. Next: July's *The Frightened Fish*.

And how did Dent dream Doc up?

"In looking about for a character for all these stories I was going to write, I looked at what people had gone for already. So, I took Sherlock Holmes, with his deductive ability. Tarzan of the Apes, with his towering physique and muscular ability; Craig Kennedy [a "science detective" from early pulps] with his scientific knowledge; and Abraham Lincoln with his Christliness. Then, I rolled 'em all into one to get—Doc Savage."

Doesn't Doc have any vices at all? Doesn't he even kiss the heroine?

"Lord, no!" Dent exclaims. "For eight volumes—that goes back eight years—he hasn't kissed anything but the blueprints of a jet-propelled fire extinguisher that saved his life."

Don't get the idea that the inventions in *Doc Savage* are goofy. "We—that's Doc and I," industrious Dent says, "just anticipate the scientists; that's all."

Here are the firsts which this inventive team has scored:

—Dreamed up Sea-trace, that stuff that's dropped out of planes to color the water for downed fliers, 10 years or more before it came into actual use for our armed forces.

—Used radar as far back as 1934, although it had been in a laboratory state of development before then.

From 1964-1990, Bantam Books reprinted all of Doc's adventures in paperbacks—including Dent's previously unpublished *Red Spider* and the very first saga, *The Man of Bronze*.

Doc Savage Pulp & Comics Covers: Copyright 1933, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1940 Street & Smith Publications

—Employed a chemical to frighten sharks away from swimmers at least 10 years before the U.S. Navy used it in World War II.

—Utilized a nerve gas, and such a gas is reputed to have been used later by the Germans.

—Used the super-sonic dog-whistle long before it was developed and marketed.

—Employed a small anesthetic gas grenade. Dent doesn't know how much use was made of this item in WWII, but the U.S. military *has* experimented with it.

Many, many years ago, Doc used a breathing device for submarines. Such a gadget was suddenly sprung on the Allies by the Germans near WWII's end, and it almost turned submarine warfare in their favor.

Machine-pistols? Doc was firing those a long time ago. Also, Doc had infrared black-light-photography flash bulbs before they were perfected and marketed. And he used wire recording 12 years before it was offered to the public.

In 1935, a fellow in Miami, Florida constructed a treasure-finding gadget on Dent's specifications. From this, years later was developed the U.S. Army's device for locating land mines. The same fellow turned them out.

Dent's grammar is not the best. On three different occasions, he has had editors call him into their New York offices and say, "Here, Wyoming, we've got a little present for you." They have then given him an elementary grammar book. (Alas for the editors, he never read a single one of them!)

Photo Courtesy Vada Norfolk, Barnett/Norma Dent

As a youngster in Wyoming, Dent first encountered pulp magazines. It changed his whole life.

Growing up on a ranch, Dent punched cows. "Every time they punched me," he says, "I punched them back."

Writing *Doc Savage* has provided Dent with unusual experiences.

"Next to the time I took my wife to a Ponca City, Oklahoma movie on the day we married and I tried to give the tickets to a wooden Indian, I haven't been so embarrassed by anything as I was by news that came to me through the FBI one day. They asked me please not to make the ransom notes in my stories so realistic. Seems a kidnapper had just clipped one out bodily and used it in Detroit to collect a ransom."

A truly tragic note was struck when it came out that a small boy had been so fascinated by a Doc Savage prisoner's knot that he tried it on himself, in his father's basement. It worked too well, strangling him.

"Thereafter, I didn't get too specific about knots, or the ingredients of poisonous drugs or gases," Dent explains. He didn't even get specific about jiu-jitsu holds after it was revealed that the lifeguards at an Atlantic Coast beach had been demonstrating Doc Savage's method of producing unconsciousness to nerve pressure in the spinal area and had killed two people.

Dent, horseman and expert shot that he is, has a quick explanation for why he doesn't write Westerns. "Shucks," he says, "I was raised on a ranch! Now wouldn't I be crazy to go writing about something I knew all about? I've never been north of southern Alaska, but I write wonderful stories about the North Pole. You're crazy if you think you're going to get me to write about Pumpkin Buttes, Wyoming. I've *already* seen Pumpkin Buttes."

He has, too. Pumpkin Buttes is near the Greasewood Ranch where he grew up, the only child of two ranch people who lived so far from neighbors that when Allie Dent, his mother, went next door to borrow a cup of sugar, she carried enough oats in the buggy to feed the horse for a week.

"When that particular part of Wyoming began to get settled, the folks took me in a covered wagon, the real old-fashioned way, and we broke a trail over the Big Horn Mountains.

"Punch cows? Of course, I punched cows. All up and down the Wyoming slopes I punched cows. Every time they punched me, I punched them back."

His dad gave Lester his first rifle when he was seven years old. "I shot my first antelope when I was eight. The antelopes were thicker than rabbits out there where we lived."

Young Dent got into a great deal of reading in those days: Sheep-dip catalogs, almanacs and Lydia Pinkham pamphlets. Then, a blood-and-thunder pulp magazine fell into his hands. It changed his whole life. "I never read such wonderful literature before. The minute I got through helping Dad to put out a prairie fire, skin a bear or whatever other boring, everyday humdrum duty I had to go through, I would rush to the bunkhouse and read pulp magazines in which people really got active.

"I had no playmates; I lived a completely distorted youth. My only playmate was my imagination, and that period of intense imaginative creation which kids generally get over at age five or six, I carried till I was 12 or 13. My imaginary voyages and accomplishments were extremely real. I almost think I learned at the time a form of self-hypnosis."

Dent himself seriously wonders sometimes why he can't write short stories and novels that make greater use of his Western background. "There are Wall Street secretaries writing stories about cattle rustlers that haven't seen a pickpocket," Dent notes, "whereas we really had cattle rustlers in Wyoming. And I can tell you about the time the range men and settlers of that whole section of Wyoming formed a posse and took out after a bunch of horse thieves. The horse thieves retreated to a place called Hole in the Wall—famous outlaw hideout—and fought off the posse for three days. When they got bored, the horse thieves chased the posse off. It really happened that way. Maybe that's why I can't write Western stories. I might tell the truth."

Tiring of cow-punching and farming, Dent decided to be a banker. So, he went to Chillicothe Business College at Chillicothe, Missouri, to enroll. While he was waiting to fill out the blanks, the boy next in line told him that a business college graduate who entered a bank only made $15 a week to start, whereas a graduate of the telegraphy course could make more than $35 a week the minute he got out. Dent decided then and there to take the telegraphy course.

He was married, and working as a telegraph operator in Tulsa, Oklahoma, when he came to work one day and found a fellow operator, not due to go to work until two hours later, pecking away on a typewriter. "I asked him, 'Whatever in the world makes you so crazy as to come up here two hours ahead of time?' The fellow replied, 'I'm writing a story.' 'Writing a story?' I said, and I started laughing. I laughed uncontrollably. I was still laughing when this fellow turned over a piece of paper on his desk, and it was a $450 check for his last story. I quit laughing."

Dent decided then and there that if one telegraph operator could write $450 short stories on the side, so could another. To Dent, it didn't matter that he had flunked English grammar in high school three times successively and might not be cut out to be a writer. "I was out to spend any and all $450 checks I could get my hands on; that's all I thought about," Dent says. He wrote 12 stories—four of them were books—and didn't sell a word!

"I was beginning to hate that other telegraph operator when I saw him. And my wife was beginning to hate me, because I wrote all the time. Even Christmas Day, my wife had to see both the turkey and my typewriter on the table. But finally, I sold a story to the now-defunct *Top Notch* magazine for $250. That launched me. Almost immediately, I began to sell practically everything I wrote—several hundred dollars' worth a month.

"Then, I knocked out a 9,000-word adventure story on flying—why shouldn't I? I had met a guy named Orville Wright once—and submitted it to another pulp writer, a night editor on a Tulsa newspaper, for his opinion. 'It's terrible,' he told me. 'Burn it! You've managed, even though you're new in the field, to make a little name for yourself now, and this will surely spoil your reputation.' He not only said, 'Burn it!' but he gave me some matches. I was foolhardy: I mailed the story to Dell Publishing and in about three days, I got a telegram.

"The wire said, 'Can you come to New York at once to write exclusively for us with a $500 a month drawing account to start?' I telegraphed a friend of mine in New York City asking him to find out if there was a reputation for insanity attached to the Dell people. He wired back that he had been unable to find out about their sanity, but that they were a big outfit.

"Finally, I got a leave of absence from my employers, the Associated Press. I told what I thought were some wonderful lies about wanting to go to New York so my wife could be operated on or something. The first thing I found out when I got to New York was that I hadn't fooled the AP at all, but they were willing to give me my old job back if I failed.

"When I entered the office of Richard E. Martinsen, the Dell official who had sent me the telegram, he tossed a copy of Dashiell Hammett's latest book at me and said, 'This is the sort of thing we want you to do. What impresses us about your writing is the fast movement, the brittle violence of emotion and action.'

"Well, I tried. They gave me three whole magazines to fill every month, and I immediately began to get fabulously rich and go Greenwich Village. I was an *author*. I rolled in dough for four months, and then all three magazines resoundingly went broke. I don't think it was all my fault. This was 1932, and I'm sure the Depression can assume some of the responsibility. I kept writing, but nobody would buy the stuff. This went on month after month, till half-a-year had gone by. Seeing the jig was up, I packed, and the wife and I left New York so poor I didn't even let the porters carry our bags, as I didn't have money to tip them."

While working as a telegrapher, Dent first decided to try his hand at writing.

Wherever business demands, Dent flies—in his own plane.

If you can't get rich one way, you can get rich another, Dent decided, and the next means he tried was panning for gold in the Southwest. It was something he had always wanted to do, anyway.

Les and his wife, Norma, carried a pan into Death Valley—"I had heard about Death Valley Scotty finding gold, so I figured that was a good place to start"—and lived with the famed Death Valley Scotty. It seemed to Dent that anybody with as much gold as Scotty was reputed to have wouldn't want to keep all of it. He remembers that he was "there some time prospecting with Scotty, but I never did hit pay dirt."

The Dents didn't starve, however. On Scotty's place were date trees transplanted from Egypt, and Scotty, using a tommy-gun, shot down all the dates the Dents could eat. "It buggered the dates up a bit," Dent recalls, "but we appreciated the gesture."

Ambitious Dent and his wife then panned for gold elsewhere in Arizona, and in Chihuahua in Old Mexico and along the Dolores River in southwestern Colorado. "We didn't do so bad," he recalls. "Sometimes we found edible roots in the pan."

They did pan enough gold to pay for their trip, and then returned to New York. "I had dreamed up this idea for *Doc Savage*. While I wrote and sold other stories—the publishing depression was over enough for me to make a little money—I hounded the Street and Smith people to bring out Doc. They did. The first number appeared with the publisher listing 'Kenneth Roberts' as the author. I don't know who was madder, me or the real Roberts. Whoever in the office had chosen the name didn't know there *was* a Kenneth Roberts already established as a *Saturday Evening Post* writer. They changed the name to Kenneth Robeson and apologized to Roberts. They never have apologized to me."

Dent's first gesture, after the new magazine's prosperity, was to buy a yacht. "Having been raised in Wyoming, where we had to haul our drinking water 20 miles in a barrel and then strain the wiggle-worms out with a flour-sack, it was inevitable that I should want to see the sea. Also, I had been writing and selling a lot of sea stories. After my 50th story about the ocean, I thought I should go look at it." He went, and has never been able to write a sea story since. He doesn't know why, unless it's the old trouble that he must write about something he has never seen.

Art: Robert G. Harris

Doc "still discovers strange tribes of people," notes Dent, but the hero "has *never* left this planet."

The yacht figured in his life for the next five years. Once it was stolen. The one-time cowboy followed its trail all up and down the Atlantic coast till finally, at Norfolk, Virginia, the Coast Guard found it, still manned by the man who had taken it. Outraged, Dent strapped on a six-shooter and roared down to deal with the thief, an ex-rum-runner. "The no-good son of a sea-cook wouldn't fight! I told him he was better set for a battle than I was, not being handicapped by the dead weight of a six-shooter on his person the way I was, but he wouldn't scrap. Instead, he got down on his knees and told me that if he had known how much it cost to operate a yacht, he wouldn't have stolen it. He begged me to take it back."

Using diving equipment, Dent took numerous undersea movies from his yacht and then raised relief money touring northern Missouri, where he showed his films in schoolhouses 75 times. His diving equipment and treasure-locating device were exhibits at each performance. He collected money to buy school-lunches and glasses for needy children. That wasn't the last time that towering Dent played the good Samaritan role, though he doesn't like to talk about it. In recent years, he has assumed responsibility for several young men who were in trouble with the law. In at least three cases, they were already virtually on their way to the state prison farm when he intervened. Out of the three, two have continued to go straight.

The yacht was fun. That is, until Dent, his wife, and two employees were caught out in mid-ocean during a hurricane. "The wind came straight off Florida," he says. "It had palm trees, bungalows, divorcees, everything in it! For two days, it blew about 250 [miles] an hour. Then, it settled back to a mere 125. Duck? Of course I wanted to duck. I was never so ready to swap a yacht for a submarine in my life."

Once he made shore, Wyoming's gift to dime-literature sold the yacht, hired a secretary to whom he could dictate his Doc Savage stories while he was on sight-seeing buses, and went to Europe with his wife and the secretary. He was arrested in Czechoslovakia for taking pictures, and put in jail. "I remembered all the times that Doc had been imprisoned, and what means he had used to escape, but I found calling up the local Associated Press was the most practical course to follow. This particular AP man had written the constitution of Czechoslovakia, so the president

came to the jail, got me and the wife out, and entertained us at the presidential shack all afternoon. Even Doc Savage couldn't do better than that."

By 1940, the Dents had accumulated so many souvenirs, what-nots and truck in general that they had to build some place to keep it. Furthermore, the cowboy author of *Doc Savage* was a little tired, temporarily, of traveling around all over the world with five typewriters. So, he moved to La Plata, Missouri, a village of 1,500 people, and built the House of Gadgets as his home is called. It is the kind of place that good *Doc Savage* readers go to when they die.

The garage door opens automatically when the Dents' Packard comes up the driveway. A communication system enables Mrs. Dent—should she be in the attic—to talk to Les in the basement, or vice versa, or wherever they happen to be. There is a darkroom for developing film and a burglar alarm system that challenges anything bigger than a fly. There are concealed doors, fluorescent lighting, delayed-action switches, closets that

Art: Walter M. Baumhofer

"I believe a writer does much better work under his own name," Dent opines.

light up when you open the door, and, it is rumored, an electric eye that starts a fire under the coffee-pot if you just wave good-morning at it.

A whole wing of the house is devoted to Dent's five typewriters.

There, in the House of Gadgets, he throws his parachute after a plane trip, and there, quite over a thousand miles from New York City and the editors, he observes his eccentricities. He works from 9 p.m. till 3 a.m., because as he puts it, "There's nothing else to do then." He sleeps till 10:30 a.m. and eats only two meals a day. Boy Scouts come to him to learn telegraphy, camping, knot-tying and woodcraft. For adults, he has a bar. When the bar is open, he has been known to talk of running for Congress, and to declare, "I wouldn't mind if *today* there was as much emphasis on independence and self-reliance as there was when *I* was a boy!"

Restless Dent owns and flies a plane now. "I thought I had gotten away from the yacht," he says, "but I find I didn't. A plane is just a land-going yacht, in expense, and don't let anybody tell you differently."

His 72-year-old father, the one-time Wyoming cattleman, now farms just outside of La Plata, and makes a good living off his land. Les has just as much acreage next to it, as well-stocked as his father's, and can't make a dime on it. Bern Dent bought a copy of his son's *Doc Savage* once. The old man's only comment after reading it, was, "Well, Les, you always could lie."

Flying his own plane, versatile Dent skedaddles to Kansas City, to St. Louis, to Chicago, and even to New York, whenever business demands. Needless to say, he doesn't write flying stories any more—since he learned to fly.

Not counting his flying, game-hunting, fishing, skiing, archery or magic (at which he's no slouch), Dent now has two hobbies. One is hypnotism. He isn't expert at it yet; so far, the only person he has put to sleep was a girl who runs a telephone switchboard, and she probably was half-asleep to start with. His other hobby is teaching a secretary, a house-maid or another telegraph operator to write detective-adventure fiction.

"Don't worry about titles," he tells them. "You can get titles out of Shakespeare. Any page of Shakespeare will give you a dozen titles. But concentrate on *plot*; never have your hero do anything that you wouldn't like to do yourself."

That, if anything, is the secret of the Dent success. He isn't interested in showing a sensitive young female neurotic in a boarding house going to pieces because she always gets the cracked teacup. Instead, he writes about tall, strong, glowing, super-brilliant people we would all like to be, adventurers like Doc Savage.

He shies a little at first from admitting responsibility for all the flood of supermen in blood-and-thunder stories since *Doc Savage* began.

"Are you really glad you started this wave of super people in the pulp magazines and comic strips?" Dent has been asked.

(continued on page 66)

The prolific author's hobbies include sailing, flying, game-hunting, fishing, skiing, archery and magic.

Valiant's Eternal Warrior fights once more forever.

HERO IMMORTAL

By DREW BITTNER

When Valiant Comics' mega-crossover *Unity* runs its 18-part course, a new hero will emerge from the wreckage to become part of the line's continuity: The Eternal Warrior, written by Janet Jackson. Though new to Valiant readers, the Warrior has a long history.

Born 10,000 years ago, his name was Gilad-Anni-Padda. "He wasn't special growing up," Jackson explains, "but everyone around him got old and died, except for his younger brother ["Armstrong" of another new Valiant title, *Archer and Armstrong*]. No one else in history—not even relatives—has been like these two, and neither knows why they were blessed (or cursed) with everlasting life. Each of them has had to figure out who they are and what their lives mean for themselves. They can't find anybody with the perspective to help them, so they develop different philosophies.

"The Warrior was always a leader or chieftain, but after fighting for his first 100 years, he realized that conquest and aggression are only destructive. Converting to the cause of civilization, he has spent the past 10,000 years fighting for civilization. He may not fight on sides we would expect, but he always does what he believes is right."

However, his idealism isn't shared by his younger brother. While the Warrior pursued his goals, Armstrong ignored the world's problems. Now, Armstrong is a nihilist and the Warrior is a "pro-active pacifist."

"He doesn't like fighting, even though he's the best fighting man who has ever lived," Jackson says, "but he'll do it for the right reasons. If he can avoid a fight, he will. But some things you can't avoid. Because of what he is, sometimes trouble comes looking for him."

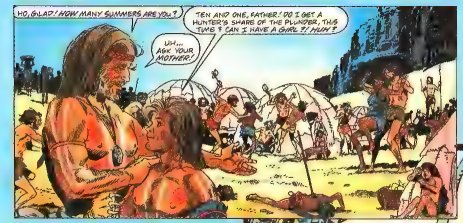
Art: Frank Miller/Colors: Janet Jackson

Although he has been around for eons, Jackson says the Eternal Warrior tried to avoid becoming a mythic figure, but admits that he was the basis for Gilgamesh and a handful of other legendary heroes. "He doesn't want admirers, worshippers or devotees," she says. "He mostly wants to work on his own. That isn't to say he wouldn't pitch in and help out a group, if they had some similar goals, but he isn't a team player by nature. Being on his own for a few thousand years has done that to him."

As his background is explored, his role in many famous historical events will gradually be revealed. Readers will build up a picture of who the Warrior is through his actions. Presenting him this way, Jackson explains, lets readers see how events like those in *Unity* affect him.

"The Warrior's attitudes will change somewhat over time," she confirms. "He'll be growing and changing. It might be hard to see how he has changed, because readers won't have much basis for comparison right away, but we'll be filling in his background. Readers can see for themselves what happens."

Colors: Maurice Fontenot


HO, GLAD! HOW MANY SUMMERS ARE YOU?
TEN AND ONE, FATHER! DO I GET A HUNTER'S SHARE OF THE PLUNDER, THIS TIME? CAN I HAVE A GIRL TO HOW?
UH... ASK YOUR MOTHER!

***Eternal Warrior* #1 shows what boys like Gilad-Anni-Padda did before youth programs were created.**

hero with an idealistic philosophy, without making that philosophy overwhelm the action or vice versa. The character is a doer, not moody or introspective, and there will be plenty of action."

The Eternal Warrior will be thrown into the spotlight thanks to the *Unity* crossover, wherein all the heroes of the Valiant Universe must band together to stop an insane would-be goddess from destroying the world by reshaping it in her image. To the Warrior, who's dedicated to personal freedom and social progress, this is the ultimate fight.

"This situation threatens all life on Earth, but it also threatens each person's liberty," Jackson says. "This is totally antithetical to what the Warrior stands for. He feels so strongly about it that he goes to find

Art: Walt Simonson; Colors: Jade

In the meantime, Jackson plans that each early issue will have a "flashback" sequence, constantly unearthing the Warrior's past.

"He might have fought alongside the Romans at one time, but against them elsewhere," she muses. "We figured he stood with the Greeks against the Persians at Thermopylae, when the Persians invaded to destroy Greek civilization. His looks are fairly nonethnic, with black hair and a medium complexion, so that he can fit in with many kinds of people."

The concept for the Eternal Warrior grew out of late-night talks with Jackson and Valiant editor-in-chief Jim Shooter. "We've known each other for years and have always had great philosophical discussions," she says. "All those talks turned into a character when we realized that we had a place in our line for somebody like the Warrior.

"This whole concept might sound really sappy, so we're trying to make it seem realistic—which is tough to do. If this guy existed in the world today, what would he do? He might go to the Middle East and stay there, preventing all the problems they've had for ages—or he might think it's just a passing skirmish.

"We're working hard not to do something cliché; we can present a

This Warrior's "a doer, not moody or introspective," says Janet Jackson.

ARAM... ARAM!
WE... WE HAVE TO GATHER MORE MEN! WE HAVE TO AVENGE THIS!
NO...
I'M NOT LIKE YOU, GILLY. MY RAGE... IS SPENT...
THE LEOPARD-SPIRIT NEVER LEAVES YOU.

FATHER SAID YOU WOULD FAIL US.
FATHER'S HEAD IS ON A SOLDIER'S PIKE...! MORE DEATH WILL NOT UNDO THAT.
BESIDES... HE ALWAYS LIKED YOU BEST.
YOU'RE MY BROTHER! YOU MUST HELP ME!

All Eternal Warrior Interior Art: John Dixon. All Eternal Warrior Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1992 Voyager Communications Inc. Colors: Paul Antio

Differing philosophies will later grow into a bitter "Unity" between the Warrior and his brother Armstrong.

Armstrong and tricks him into helping out, insisting that this is the fight they were born to win. Needless to say, Armstrong isn't very happy at being duped by his big brother, and this leads to some fairly acrimonious family relations."

The personal philosophies of the Warrior and Armstrong are strongly expressed through their appearance. Armstrong, Jackson says, is presented as "a tired, weary, jaded old curmudgeon—but he's actually the younger one. The Warrior looks vibrant and alive because life hasn't trampled on him. His mission in life, to protect and advance civilization, keeps him going. His fight is never finished. He gets discouraged sometimes, sure—he can and does lose fights—but he never loses faith in his ultimate goals. While Armstrong would watch a Hitler come to power and shrug, figuring he could stay drunk for a decade and ignore the problem, the Warrior wades in to see what he could do. The Warrior is a hidden face in history, behind the movers and shakers, and Armstrong is passed out under a table far away from momentous events."

John Dixon, an Australian artist whose *Airhawk* comic strip was a successful newspaper serial for 20 years, is *Eternal Warrior*'s artist.

"He's very influenced by illustrators like Stan Drake, so his artwork has a very classic, very precise and realistic look to it," Jackson says. "He does so many things that artists today fall short on: Great scenery, helicopters, airplanes, boats—he does wonderful rooms!"

Jackson says she hasn't worked out any regular villains or adversaries for the Warrior yet, though she admits, "I have some ideas, things I'm working on but haven't finished yet. One idea I've had is a character called the Incarnation, who's constantly reincarnated, so that he's an *ongoing* enemy for this immortal hero. The incarnation has appeared as a man, a woman, a child—and has always been the Warrior's enemy."

She adds, "I've just started writing recently, so I'm pretty new to it. Jim [Shooter] has been helping me a great deal. I've been an editor for a while now, but writing uses other talents. I'm still learning the ropes as a writer, but I enjoy it."

Although she has earned a reputation as a superb colorist, Jackson prefers editing to any other task in comics. "Editing draws on so many diverse creative skills and talents, it

Colors: Paul Auito

Jackson's philosophical talks with Valiant editor-in-chief Jim Shooter were behind *Eternal Warrior*'s genesis.

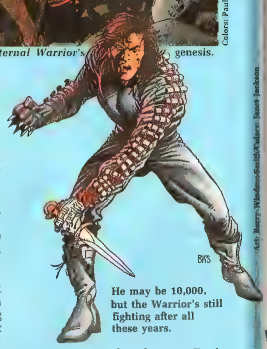
takes a little bit of everything to be an editor. I'm probably not good enough to pencil one of our books, and I'm not the world's best inker, but I know enough about those things to make good editorial decisions. And about storytelling, writing, printing—there are so many facets to this job, it's impossible to describe how hard the job can be, but I love it. I don't think there's any other job where I could use my creativity and be as involved as I am here."

Even as Marvel's Art Director for Advertising, a job she held while picking up extra money as a colorist, Jackson felt that, with so many books being produced, her contributions weren't always encouraged.

"The editors appreciated it when I looked over the art and made notes, they really did, but they didn't encourage input from their colorist," she says. "There wasn't as much opportunity to get my ideas heard the way there is here."

Nevertheless, she enjoyed working on Marvel titles like *Alien Legion* and *DP-7*, adding that she loves the work of artists like Barry Windsor-Smith and Larry Stroman. "In Larry's case, I always wondered why editors weren't fighting Carl Potts to get him on their books! But now, he's finally getting the recognition he deserves."

Jackson describes the Valiant Universe as what the New Universe at Marvel *might* have been. "This is what Jim wanted to do, but *couldn't*," Jackson says. "It's also a very distinct take on a superhero universe. Jim has always held that the Marvel Universe was built on magic," she says. "A guy getting powers from a spider bite isn't exactly based on science! But the Valiant Universe is more science-fiction based. Jim has a very strong science background, and he has used it to better ground this universe in reality.



Art: Barry Windsor-Smith/Valiant; Jason Jackson

He may be 10,000, but the Warrior's still fighting after all these years.

"Our stories take place on Earth, here and now," she says. "We're trying to take a very realistic approach to presenting superhuman characters,

(continued on page 60)

Colors: Maria Baccari

The Warrior may abhor violence, but Jackson assures that "he's the best fighting man who has ever lived."

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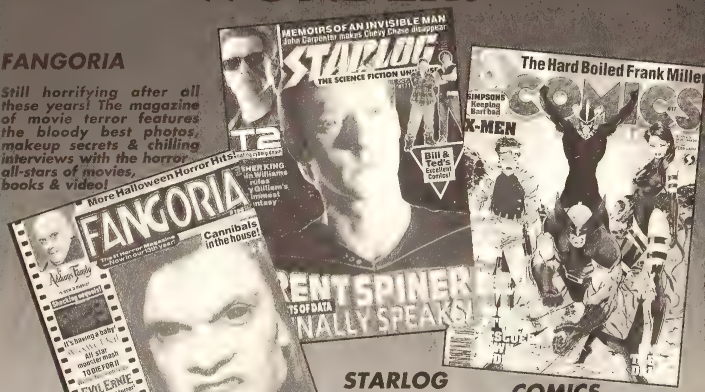

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WINDING UP COGSWORTH

It's hard to imagine anyone other than Jerry Orbach voicing Lumiere, the French-accented candelabra, in Walt Disney Pictures' *Beauty & the Beast*. But, in fact, another prominent performer originally auditioned for the role. His name? David Ogden Stiers—the same actor who eventually voiced the film's persnickety enchanted clock, Cogsworth.

After Stiers' tryout for Lumiere, wherein the *M*A*S*H* alumnus sang as much of Lumiere's signature song, "Be Our Guest," as was complete at the time, he was shown a sketch of another of the film's primary characters: The pompous, fussbudgety Cogsworth. The drawing made "a bell tone go off in my head," recalls Stiers. "It gave me the [character's] pitch, pretty much, and the resonance and placement [of his voice]. The general feeling was that he was too tightly wound."

Apparently his reading was what directors Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise were looking for; Stiers was offered the role, and turned it into a piece of showmanship acting. Says Stiers with a laugh, "I should publicly apologize to [Jerry] Orbach for having had the temerity, the hubris, to have gone in (to audition) for Lumiere, given what he did, because I thought it was just breathtaking."

Stiers' reasons for joining *Beauty & the Beast* had less to do with the actual work than with the opportunity to "[join the leagues of] Disney's voice pool from *way* back, people like Hans Conreid and Verna Felton...some of [animation's] great voice-workers. It made for a sort of fraternal feeling."

Be it for television, stage or film, the 49-year-old actor believes that his approach to every part is identical. "The difficulties are in the particular medium. It doesn't matter if you're doing a commercial, a radio show or Shakespeare—all the work starts in the same place. You learn as much as you think you need to know about a character; if it's a toss-off, then you get two or three broad colors and play those colors with all the energy you have."

As for Cogsworth, all Stiers needed to know was that in human form "he" had been the majordomo—in effect, the butler. But a majordomo means more to me—he runs the household. It's fairly common knowledge that there's a lot of water loss during the enchantment process, so he was probably a perfectly normal-sized person. I wanted a vaguely squeezed, or compacted, sound for him—my version of too tightly wound."

According to David Ogden Stiers, Cogsworth was "too tightly wound."

Angela Lansbury and Jerry Orbach in Disney-animated *Beauty & the Beast*'s Enchanted Ones: Lumiere, Mrs. Potts and Cogsworth.

In a deleted song which was storyboarded but not animated, the scene-stealing trio contemplated what it would be like to be "Human Again."

All Beauty & the Beast stills Copyright 1991 The Walt Disney Company

At no point was the experience limiting for him as a performer, says Stiers. "In a weird way, you're freed beyond anything you ever thought. There are *no* limitations in animation. If there were difficulties, it was, 'What sound does an essentially inanimate object make when it's kicked down stairs or thrown into fell-O?'"

His vocal tracks, recorded over an eight-month period in "seven or eight intensive sessions" in Florida, New York and California, were defined by a sense of "camaraderie," according to Stiers, even though he worked with his *Beauty & the Beast* co-stars only once.

"One Saturday in New York, we were required [to be] at a recording session—[Robby] Benson, Orbach, [Angela] Lansbury and me—to record to 'time,' to orchestra. The music for the scene, the castle's storming, had already been done, and there were windows within which it had to be fitted. Obviously, they're not going to pull the New York Philharmonic back in and re-record for the convenience of some actors. We actually had a wonderful, pleasant day, sitting around and having lunch in this huge recording studio—the old RCA Studios."

The highlight of that day for Stiers was listening to the playback of Lansbury's singing of the film's title tune, which the actress had just completed. "I remember reaching over and taking Howard's [Ashman] hand in thanks of what we had just heard. I suppose he knew that he had written something quite wonderful, but to actually hear it back...My God, the doubts that plague artists about whether what they do is worth anything. I think he knew damn well how good it was."

Directors Trousdale and Wise were, in Stiers' estimation, "very, very trusting. I guess after the first session, when I asked if they minded if I did an alternative to some of the written lines—and they said no, they didn't mind, it was *only* tape—they got a better idea of how I work. They loved a couple of things I did—they might not have been usable, but they then understood that if they asked if I had an alternative [idea], more often than not, yes, I did. Some of the stuff I improvised is actually in the movie."

What were David Ogden Stiers' feelings about the finished product? "Frankly, I thought *Beauty & the Beast* was great storytelling. The mood in the lobby [after the screening in Hollywood] was, quite rightly, self-congratulatory. The feeling was that these people [the cast and crew of *B&B*] were being given a party that they had damn well earned."

—Kyle Counts

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GOTHAM CINEMA

When "Batman Returns," Denise Di Novi's challenge is producing the big picture.

By MARC SHAPIRO

Denise Di Novi has heard it all. Well, almost all. But, what kind of person does it take to work with Tim Burton? "You know, that's the first time anyone has ever asked me *that* question," says the *Batman Returns* producer.

"A producer working with Tim definitely needs a different kind of mindset. His filmmaking sense comes from a creative/artistic place, rather than from a technical place. So, with Tim, my job as producer has been to wait for him to get divine inspiration."

Di Novi did the Tim Burton "sit-around-and-wait" once before on *Edward Scissorhands*. Sitting in her production trailer while rain peppers the Warner Bros. Studios lot where *Batman Returns* is lensing, she's comfortable with her place in Burton's filmmaking universe.

"Once you've figured Tim out, it's not that difficult," she continues. "All I have to do is bring together the elements that'll help him come as close as possible to realizing his vision. On the one hand, it's easy, but on the other, it can be difficult."

Di Novi, a straight-to-the-point type, doesn't get this philosophical often. She quickly returns to raw data on *Batman Returns* (due for release this month).

"We still have 10 days of filming. Post-production will be intense, but we've been cutting the movie as we go, so it won't be too bad. It's definitely a crazy time, but we can make it."

While "making it," Di Novi has overcome numerous challenges.

"What we've seen [in *Batman Returns*]," says producer Denise Di Novi, "is vintage Tim Burton."

"Everything on this movie was a challenge. It's different than *Edward [Scissorhands]*. It's a big picture. It's a sequel. We wanted to make an *original* Batman movie, not merely a sequel, and to create our own world—which meant we had to build everything from the ground up without using practical locations. Every aspect of this movie was tough."

Di Novi's perception of *Batman Returns* and Burton is colored by the fact that she wasn't around for *Batman*. But she knows that "Tim was a surprise choice to direct the first film.

"People didn't know anything about him. He had made *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* and *Beetlejuice*, but the consensus was that he was an out-of-left-field, crazy choice to direct something as big as *Batman*."

Di Novi, on *Batman Returns*, was a witness to the process the director effected when deciding whether to helm the "further adventures." What was missing was a script. Then, suddenly, Burton was ready to go.

"We got a script from Dan Waters that really excited us," she explains. "We both read it, and Tim's response was that he would make this movie even if the main character *wasn't* Batman. The thing that jumped out at me was that, while Batman remained much the same character, we had a great story with a different twist. The Penguin and Catwoman were about as exciting as the Batman character was in the first movie."

Batman Returns, scripted by Waters and Wesley Strick, takes place approximately three years after the first film. Batman (Michael Keaton) is as neurotic as ever and, as the story unfolds, he finds himself going up against a trio of baddies, the Penguin (Danny DeVito), the Catwoman (Michelle Pfeiffer) and Max Shreck (Christopher Walken). At stake? His reputation and the future of Gotham City.

While Burton wrestled with six drafts of what the producer describes as "a not-as-dark, but still dark movie," Di Novi began pulling the various elements of *Batman Returns* together. First on her checklist was the location.

"We *never* considered shooting this movie in London," she says. "The studio had that on their minds because some of the sets from the first film were there and it seemed so logical. What we discovered was that the only sets left in London were parts of Wayne Manor and the Batcave. We knew we were going to use a small part of Wayne Manor and that we were going to expand our use of the Batcave beyond the existing sets, so it didn't make sense to go all the way to England to use bits of two sets.

Di Novi's job description as *Batman Returns* producer included waiting for Burton "to get divine inspiration."

Casting Catwoman (Michelle Pfeiffer) and the Penguin (Danny DeVito) "wasn't a big problem," Di Novi admits.

"Can a woman be a supervillain in modern society?" asks Di Novi. Batman (Michael Keaton) and Catwoman (Pfeiffer) seem to think so.

"Mexico was considered for a very short time, but the logistics—trucking in equipment long distances—ruled that out. Once we realized we were making a completely new movie requiring all-new sets, we figured we might as well shoot it in LA."

Crewing up *Batman Returns* required little more than going down the list of such Burton film alums as production designer Bo Welch (STARLOG #179), art director Rick Heinrichs (SFX #1), creature FX designer Stan Winston and composer Danny Elfman (STARLOG YEARBOOK #10). Di Novi says there was method to that madness.

"Tim's attitude has always been to work with the same people all the time. It's a security thing—which, on a movie this big, is a good idea. You don't want many unknowns around who can end up rocking the boat."

Casting, according to the producer, was also targeted at brand names. "Casting wasn't a big problem. For openers, this film didn't have that many actors, and we always had a short list of people in mind. Danny DeVito was born to play the Penguin, and once he agreed to do it, we didn't even think about that role. We had Annette Bening in mind for Catwoman and really didn't think about anybody else. When we lost her, we heard that Michelle Pfeiffer wanted to do it, and she instantly became Catwoman. It was that simple."

Once production began on *Batman Returns*, Di Novi was privy to a Burton much more in control of this film than before. She cites the presence on *Batman* of producers Peter Guber and Jon Peters and the project's intrinsic tension as determining factors.

"The first Batman movie was only half Tim's," she offers. "This movie is *completely* his. It has been a big job, and while he has never been totally loose on the set, he has been more able to do his thing creatively. What we've seen, in a sense, is vintage Tim Burton—the guy who had the free rein on *Beetlejuice* and *Pee-wee*.

Director Burton (right) counsels the Cat and the Bat on how to fight properly.

The Penguin (DeVito) may see the humor of it all, but Di Novi is [illegible]

That Penguin's (DeVito) a gasser, and he sure knows how to make an entrance.

Max Shreck (Christopher Walken) looks to add to Gotham City's troubles.

"Michael Keaton was also much happier on the set this time than he was on the first, I understand. The first one was terrible for him. He was uncomfortable with the suit and wasn't in the best physical shape. But the suit is much lighter this time and he's in much better shape."

The producer's recollections bring up the subject of how the characters, both good and bad, are being dealt with in *Batman Returns*.

"Batman is the same kind of guy in this film that he was in the first. If there's any difference, it would be that we delve into his personality and psyche a little bit more. We see his tortured nature. He's more neurotic, and we take a closer look at it.

"When it came to Catwoman and the Penguin, we knew we *didn't* want camp. We wanted real, but not merely black-and-white, and the result is much more feeling and emotion in these characters than one would expect.

"Catwoman comes across as a more liberated woman. It answers some modern, feminist questions. Can a woman be a supervillain in modern society? How will people react to it?

The Penguin was also a departure. He's *not* funny. He's dark, disturbed and totally psychotic."

Batman (Keaton, right) prepares to pluck the fowl felon's feathers.

Taking Batman that next step has resulted in Di Novi discussing the bigger picture of the big picture. She cites Burton's view of the character as "symbolic of the duality of dark and light" as indicative of their serious approach to this film. It's an approach, she says, that has transcended Batman's comic book origin.

"*None* of us immersed ourselves in the comics in preparation for this movie," Di Novi notes. "We looked at them and used them as a foundation and springboard to making [the] movie. Out of necessity, an epic Batman movie must go beyond the comics and onto a bigger canvas."

The producer concedes that no matter how good a movie *Batman Returns* is, it won't do the same kind of business ($250 million-plus) as the 1989 adventure. And that fact, she explains, has made *Batman Returns* less stressful.

"There's no way we can repeat *Batman*'s success. The pressure's really off and we can relax. Nobody in their wildest dreams thinks we're going to catch lightning in a bottle a second time. But, having said that, we can just make the best movie we can—maybe even a better movie. I feel pretty confident that we have."

Di Novi has similar feelings about *Edward Scissorhands*, a film she describes as "a charmed experience."

"Everyone has felt like *Edward Scissorhands* at one, and so we all had a kind of emotional tie to the film while it was being made. It was a relatively small film, but building the suburban housing tract and the castle was a lot of hard work. It was such a personal thing that nobody minded the work.

"The film got excellent reviews and I think everybody was happy with how well it did. Nobody believed *Edward Scissorhands* was going to be a huge commercial hit. The film had a lot of sadness to it and it involved this strange character. But people really gravitated toward it."

Denise Di Novi's film career began in journalism. She graduated from copy-editing and staff-writing positions to being a film critic for Canadian TV. Jobs as unit publicist and associate producer on such films as *Visiting Hours*, *Of Unknown Origin*, *Videodrome* and *Going Berserk* followed. Her first production credit came with the controversial film *Heathers*.

"*Heathers* wasn't controversial," laughs Di Novi. "What it was, was weird."

Di Novi returns to the present and chuckles at the prospect of a *Batman III* somewhere down the line.

"This one's not even done. How can I *think* about *Batman III*? Tim may not even want to do it. Maybe he'll want to. Maybe I won't. All I can think about now is a vacation."

However, Denise Di Novi relents, offering some speculation on the future of Batman's sanity.

"I think a third film would see Batman as even more psychotic. He won't go to a shrink and get all his problems solved. Maybe he'll do that in *Batman V*."

Looks like Pfeiffer was really serious about wanting to play the Catwoman.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, COMICS!

Eclipse adds explosive movie magic to comics with "Parts Unknown."

By CRAIG W. CHRISSINGER

Nasty aliens from classic 1950s science fiction movies are back! And they want to conquer the world and steal our women! Only this time, the invasion isn't in black-and-white, 3-D or Smell-O-Vision. It's all part of a new comic book line from Eclipse Comics, designed to capture the magic of movies—the suspense, the danger, the ballyhoo—on the printed page.

"*Parts Unknown* will launch the FX line in July," says Beau Smith, writer/creator of the mini-series and Eclipse's marketing director. "The other two mini-series are *Blood is the Harvest* and *The Retaliator*. The FX line is targeted not only to the regular comics readers, but also to *anyone* who saw *Terminator*, *Total Recall*, *Die Hard*, *ALIENS* or *Predator*. We tried to come up with comics that *should* be movies, but have never been put on film. We wanted that feel.

"We've all seen comic books that have been based on movies They already have a stated continuity and a storyline to follow. What we want to do is take all the best things that all these science fiction and action-adventure blockbusters have and transfer them into comics."

The premise of *Parts Unknown* is that aliens from the planet Scalon are looking for a new home, and a little more, after their environment is destroyed. "These are really nasty, low-life aliens with *no* redeeming qualities," Smith comments. "They have two castes on their planet—the Military, who are large and strong, and the Experimenters, who are small and smart. Anyway, the Experimenters fooled around too much with their ozone, so to speak, and killed off all of their females. Not only that, but now the planet is going down the tubes. So, the Military sends out a task force to—yep—planet Earth to scope things out.

"These are lizard-like aliens with four fingers. Their bone structure is different from ours, and they have long tongues and crooked, craggy teeth. The Experimenters realize they can't move around on this planet too well, so they devise a system utilizing the chameleon-like cells in their bodies. They can take human males, strip them of internal organs, skin and whatever else they can use, and adapt that to their own bodies like you would put on a coat. It's exactly like a second skin."

They're looking for women who can physically interbreed with them and for a new planet they can take over.

While the aliens' presence is unknown at first, it isn't long before the Scalon plot is discovered by two Chicago detectives, Maria Lucci and Pendelton Spurr.

"Lucci is probably *the* woman of the '90s," Smith says. "She has been drawn to be one of the most beautiful women in comics, but she's the one who can probably go toe-to-toe with the Punisher or anyone like that. She's a hit-first, ask-questions-later type. Spurr is a huge, strapping guy and he's *not* into violence. He wants to save his handsome face, become a famous cop and sell his story to the movies. He would rather finesse his way through a bar-room brawl, whereas she basically just starts using a bat on people.

"Well, Spurr and Lucci are on a case, investigating all these kidnappings and all the mutilation-murders.

Writer/creator Beau Smith is "just out to have some fun" in *Parts Unknown*.

People on the streets think it's a new gang that has moved in and give them the tag of 'The Skins.' While checking into this possibility, they stumble onto the aliens and what they're doing."

After a confrontation with Spurr and Lucci, Scalon military commander Tragg decides "this strong, really beautiful woman is going to be his personal breeder," the writer reveals. "That's his thought, but she's the last person you want to kidnap. She's going to make them pay. So, you've got her after him because he's the head alien and she wants to off him, and he's after her because he's going to make her his little sex slave."

Smith is the first to admit that the plot isn't exactly the stuff of dramatic classics. "We're not trying to be Shakespeare," he announces. "We're just out to have some fun. This is not *The Prince of Tides* of comics. It's the *Die Hard III* and *IV*. It's meant to be just straight action-adventure, movie-fun stuff with really nice art and FX."

Parts Unknown is something that Smith has always hoped to do. "I wanted to take the premise of the movies that came out in the '50s—things like *The Mysterians*, *It Came From Outer Space* and *Mars Needs Women*—and bring it into the '90s," he explains, "just really give it a modern feel and soup it up a little bit. Those old movies were a great deal of fun. The series is kind of taking all the characters from *Hill Street Blues* and putting them in a '50s SF movie. It's a good mix of the two."

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WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Their environment destroyed, the Scalons invade Earth to conquer and breed.

For the creator of such past projects as *Beau LaDuke* and *The New Black Terror*, characters are the most important element and are usually developed *before* the storyline.

"Characters come first, and that's what means a lot to me," he says. "I figure if you can get someone hooked into the character, they're going to enjoy the story regardless of whether it's deep or shallow. There's wall-to-wall action here, but a lot of good dialogue, too. I think people will want to see Spurr and Lucci because of their character development. For instance, their one flaw is that they're both recovering alcoholics and this situation is enough to drive anyone to drink! And then you've got Lucci with her two false front teeth that she makes Spurr hold when they get into brawls. That kind of stuff.

"Tragg, the military commander, is the stereotypical villain of villains. He's the modern-day Ming the Merciless. If you remember Ming from the *Flash Gordon* films, all he wanted to do was rule everybody and get into Dale Arden's pants. Those were his *two* priorities. That's Tragg! And then you've got his brother, Harkons, who's the biggest of all the aliens. He's big and heavy-set like Tor Johnson, but acts like the bumbling sergeant who always had his pants cut off by Zorro [Henry Calvin as Sgt. Garcia in the Disney TV series]. He's a total screw-up and just down here to have sex. He doesn't care if they conquer the world or if his home planet falls apart; he's here to have some fun. He's the series' comic relief."

Although Smith created the characters and came up with the storyline, he credits penciller Brad Gorby (who's inked by Randy Clark) with adding a special touch to the project.

"Brad took exactly what I had in my head, put it down on paper and added an extra 20 percent to it," he says. "He took it beyond my dreams, and I'm very happy with it. I think that the two of us planning and working on this so close together for two years made it this good. I would work on it, then call him up and give him a dramatic reading of the script, voices and everything. That gave him the mood, so what he poured out on paper was *exactly* what I had in mind. Now, if you're into details, it's in there. Brad designed everything—weaponry, outfits, vehicles and arsenals—down to a tee."

One way the FX line aims to appeal to non-comics readers is through the artwork. Smith believes animation veteran Gorby has succeeded in bringing a cinematic form to the pages.

"Since it's geared toward a moviegoing audience, we wanted to be able to show action," he remarks. "For instance, when these aliens become either excited or enraged, their spinal columns actually rise up through the skin. Brad has developed the art so that you can almost see, panel by panel, the stuff actually move and rise. It's like pictures in a flip book, and it's that kind of effect he wants to bring back. If you do a quick eye scan, you should see transformations and special FX. It's drawn for that purpose, just as a storyboard would be for a movie."

In terms of marketing, Smith believes that being the publicist for this own comic book is a unique, but difficult experience—"more of a curse than anything else," he admits.

All Parts Unknown Art: Copyright 1992 Eclipse Comics

All Unknown Art: Brad Gorby/Randy Clark

Spurr and Lucci come upon the Scalon invasion and take on the aliens themselves.

Tragg believes he has found a mate in Lucci, but she has other things in mind.

"It's like being a coach and having your son on the team. He's the one you're hardest on. I think I also tend to push *Parts Unknown* less because I'm afraid people will think I'm just doing it because it's mine. If anything, I think I've cheated myself. I work much harder when the chance comes to push a Tim Truman *Spider* or a Chuck Dixon *Hobbit*."

That's not to say he's not doing his job in promoting the FX line. Smith feels that Eclipse is putting their best effort into getting the word to a wider audience. "We're trying to have these comics reach out, grab someone by the shirt and say, 'Hey, you like this movie. Now try this comic book.' That's the look and attitude we're aiming for. We're pushing them hard to the film world. We've talked to many people and sent out press releases to everyone who would normally get movie press releases. You know, if you throw enough stuff at the wall, some of it's going to stick. We're going to hit or miss."

In fact, Eclipse is distributing *Parts Unknown* to several national video retail stores in its attempt to reach non-comics readers. "This will be the first time that has been done, where the comic isn't based on a movie, but geared toward that audience," he explains. "Having the comics in video stores will help get the word out."

Another promotional device is the enclosure of "FX and Win" cards in every Eclipse comic released during the FX line's launch. These lottery-type tickets have a box at the top revealing the prize and 10 grey scratch-off squares. The object is to try to only scratch off three matching FX titles. Prizes range from an all-expenses paid trip to Hollywood to original FX artwork and subscriptions.

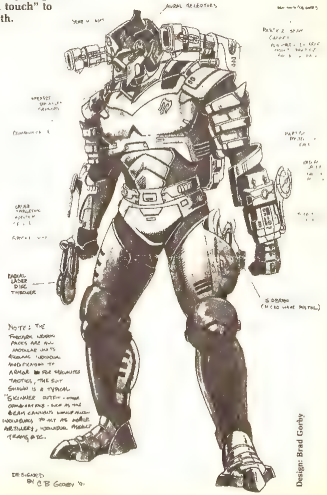
While there's a sales and marketing side to *Parts Unknown* and the FX line, Smith says he would eventually have done something with the characters of Spurr and Lucci, but he's happy with the comic.

"I know the comic is the kind of movie I would like to see," he remarks. "That's the way I looked at it from the start. We wanted to give the readers something we knew they liked. I'm one of the guys who lined up with millions of others to see the kinds of blockbuster movies I've mentioned. It just so happens that the FX line came at the right time. It has worked out really well."

There's no question that Smith would like to work with the characters of Spurr and Lucci again, though not on a permanent basis.

"I have no inclination to be a full-time writer," he states. "My real job doesn't allow time. It's something I enjoy doing on the weekends and that's it. Perhaps it could be done as a yearly mini-series. The other books would probably like to do the same. What I would really like to see is *Parts Unknown* end up as a movie. That's why these comics were created."

Summing up his experience with the FX line, Beau Smith says, "We've priced the books to be less than a movie. They're for those who just want to have some really good fun. I think it worked. It's a marketing dream: there's just so much stuff to work from. The bottom line is that we want to give our readers *ALIENS*, *Predator*, Betty Page and Bruce Willis all rolled up into *one* comic book."



In addition to designing everything, Brad Gorby added that "special touch" to *Parts Unknown*, says Smith.

Design: Brad Gorby

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DAYS OF THE DRAGON™

All Savage Dragon Art: Erik Larsen/Courtesy Image Comics

Erik Larsen isn't positive about just who---or what---his newest hero is.

By PAT JANKIEWICZ

He's a cross between Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Creature from the Black Lagoon, the biggest non-human with a bad attitude to hit Chicago since Mrs. O'Leary's cow. He's the Dragon, the newest hero from Image Comics, created by Erik Larsen.

Larsen, the versatile writer/artist on *Spider-Man* (CS #26), is extremely vague on just who or what the Dragon is. "I'm not going to go into a big origin thing in the book, and I'm keeping his past nebulous," Larsen promises. "He has amnesia, and was found naked in a burning vacant lot in the middle of Chicago. He regains consciousness in the hospital. He's questioned by police, but has no idea where he came from or who he is. Part of the story will be a search to find out, but that won't necessarily be resolved."

As to whether the Dragon was born that way, Larsen declares, "That's part of the mystery! They run some tests on him, but even the doctors aren't sure. He's certainly close enough to human. There are mutants in this world—people who have been transformed. This world is as inhabited by the same kinds of creatures as the Marvel and DC universes. They don't know what he is, or what the hell to do with him."

The artist certainly doesn't have amnesia about his character's inception. "The Dragon was created in the fourth grade. He has changed quite a bit physically since. He started out as a combination of Captain Marvel, Batman and Speed Racer," Larsen admits. "He had Captain Marvel's cape, the cut of Batman's mask and he drove Speed Racer's car! He wore bellbottom pants—very '70s! Every hero had to have bellbottoms and sideburns. They were happenin'."

Revised and reconceived, Dragon is now part of the Image line. Larsen placed his hero in a real city, as opposed to Metropolis or Central City—Chicago. "I like Chicago because other Image artists are using New York. Chicago is getting worse and worse; it has gone to hell, a war zone, with bad guys and mutants becoming gang leaders and street punks. They're starting to run the town. I'm also a big fan of *Dick Tracy*, which was set in Chicago, although they never said so. Think of Dragon as a big, green Dick Tracy!"

The Dragon won't be the Windy City's first hero. "Chicago had some local superheroes. A 'patriotic type' called SuperPatriot gets his arms torn off and is left a paraplegic in the hospital. His fighting days are over. Mighty Man, the other guy, is a 'Shazam/Captain Marvel' type, with a really weird twist. This Billy Batson-type is all grown up now; he has been around since the '40s. One morning, he steps out in his Billy Batson guise and gets knifed. Mighty Man only exists if this Billy Batson is alive, and he's dying. Because they're both out of it, the cops come to the Dragon and say, 'Please help us out! We found you, got you a job, put you through college, please help!' 'Sure!'

"They do basic training with him, and get him ready to be what they want him to be—a one-man SWAT team. He's a legitimate member of the police force, so there will be *Hill Street Blues*-type stuff where he's hanging around at the station doing cop-stuff. It's a logical step for superheroes to take. He's actually doing this as a job; he's *not* a vigilante.

"It puts a whole new swing to it, which is something I was looking for, and it makes getting into fistfights a helluva lot easier! One thing that's difficult about writing comic books is the hero swinging over the city saying, 'Look, there's a crime!' If I ran into that many crimes, I would be wondering what's wrong with me! It's pretty unlikely and coincidental that these crimes happen in comics. Considering that there have been 450 Spider-Man stories, it's incredible he has run into so many crimes."

The supporting cast is diverse. "Besides Mighty Man and Super-Patriot, it will be guys at the police station and a girl from down the hall who's sweet on the big lug.

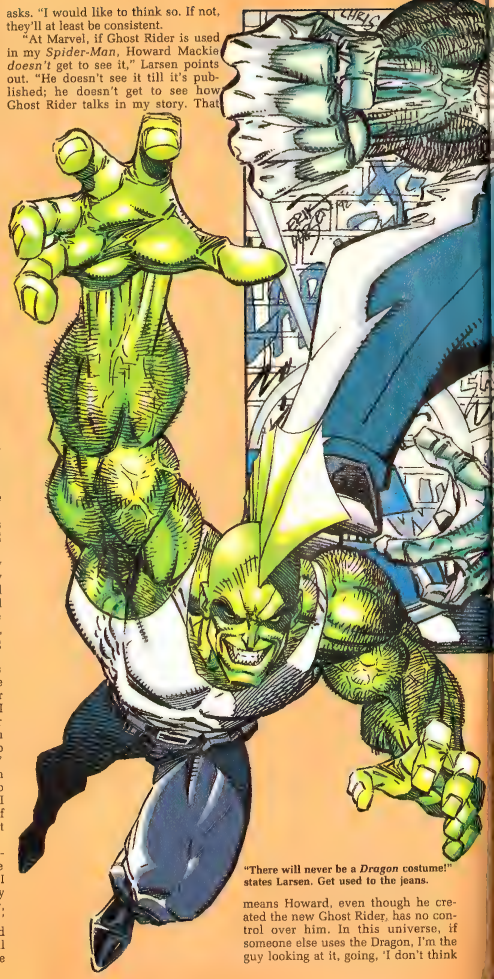
"I'm not sure how far *that's* gonna go," Larsen laughs, "but it will go to something! One of the station guys is the old secret identity from the Dragon comics I did as a kid. William Johnson changed into the Dragon. Now he's an independent character."

Larsen chose to do *The Savage Dragon* (so titled to differentiate it from TSR's gaming magazine) for Image instead of the big companies because "if I did *The Dragon* for Marvel and they decided they didn't like me, they could fire me with issue #2 and replace me with someone else, and it's *not* my character any longer. The minute I do the first issue with them, it's *theirs*, and any decision regarding that character is *their* decision.

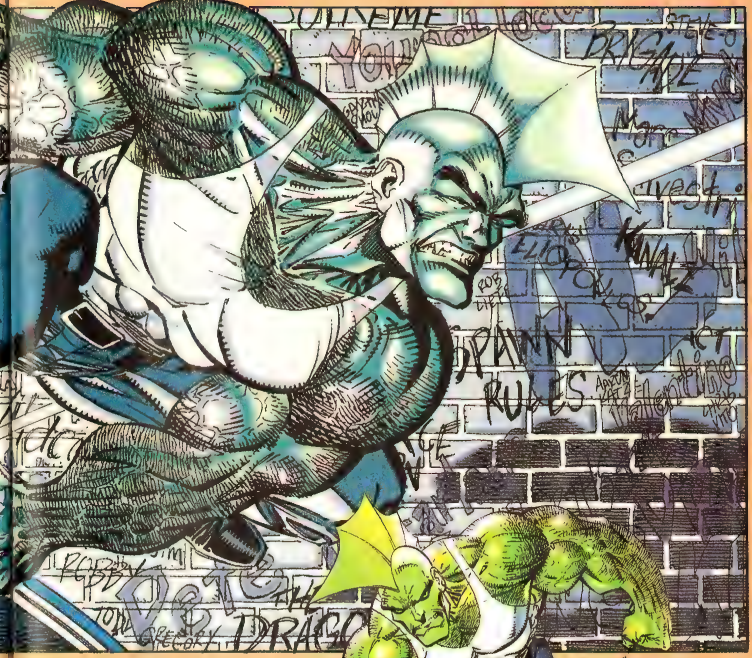
"When I was doing *Spider-Man*, as much as I wanted to do stuff, there were limitations. I can't have Peter Parker and Mary Jane get divorced, I can't have Mary Jane quit her job or get pregnant. There's so much you can't do, that you wonder, 'Can I do *anything* with the supporting cast?' Can I invent a character who can come in, cause some trouble and do something? The Dragon is something I created as a kid, and I'll be damned if I'm going to give away something that close to me," he announces.

Larsen feels his amphibious avenger has potential. "I have long-range plans for him. My feeling now is I don't want to tell his origin, but I may wake up tomorrow morning and say, 'Issue #3 is the big origin issue!' That's my right and prerogative, and there's no one to say otherwise. Will there be better stories out of this?" he asks. "I would like to think so. If not, they'll at least be consistent.

"At Marvel, if Ghost Rider is used in my *Spider-Man*, Howard Mackie *doesn't* get to see it," Larsen points out. "He doesn't see it till it's published; he doesn't get to see how Ghost Rider talks in my story. That means Howard, even though he created the new Ghost Rider, has no control over him. In this universe, if someone else uses the Dragon, I'm the guy looking at it, going, 'I don't think he would say that or do that,' or 'We've got to talk this through a little bit before you put it down on paper.' "



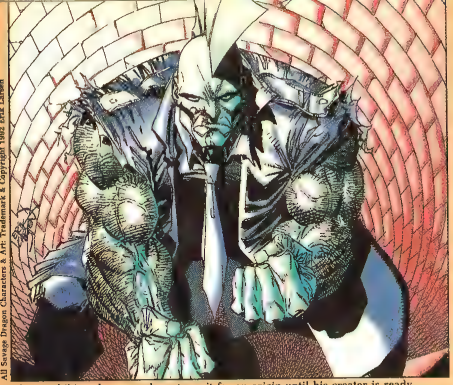
"There will never be a *Dragon* costume!" states Larsen. Get used to the jeans.



***Dragon* may be "a legitimate member of the police force," says Larsen, but he won't battle all vices. Check out the graffiti.**

Will Dragon interact with other Image characters, like Spawn and Youngblood? "Absolutely," the artist states. "There will be small cross-overs almost immediately. I'll probably pull one of Rob's [Liefeld] characters into issue #3. I don't think we'll be doing a *Secret Wars* for a while, where everybody gets together. I would like to think that it's as free-flowing as Marvel Comics is. Because we're all friends, there are no prob-

Erik Larsen's *Savage Dragon* climbs from the wreckage to star in Image Comics' latest title.



All Savage Dragon Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1992 Erik Larsen

The amphibious hero may have to wait for an origin until his creator is ready.

lems. If I want to use Todd McFarlane's character, I just call up and say, 'Todd, can I use your character?' He says, 'Fine,' and offers suggestions. I write the thing, send it to him and Todd can approve it or make changes. It's great that all this stuff can exist together at the same time."

Like McFarlane, Larsen joined Image for "creative control," he states. "That's my *main* concern. If anyone wants to option my own character for a movie, I guess I get some money out of it. But there's complete creative freedom. We still have a market that we perceive as our market, and we're not going to go out of our way to alienate that market. We're selling to people who like to read superhero comics, and generally, that's adolescents. So, when I say 'complete creative freedom,' I'm not saying we'll turn everything into smut, but we won't be submitted to the Comics Code Authority."

This suggests the Dragon may be as savage as his title implies. "There will probably be some stuff that wouldn't get by the Code," Larsen notes. "Generally speaking, exit wounds are a big no-no with the Comics Code. In some instances, the Dragon will be 'with gun' because he's a cop, even though he doesn't need it strength-wise.

"If he's fighting a supervillain, it will be because they [the cops] can't shoot the villain. I perceive this world as realistic. It always struck me strange in Marvel Comics: Here comes Doc Ock; just shoot the guy in the head and we don't have to deal with him anymore. If there are villains who aren't bullet-proof or can't protect themselves, a cop *is* gonna blow them away, as in real life."

Image's final impact on the comics industry remains to be seen. "I'm hoping that there will be a trickle-down theory to the big companies and loosen them up a little more. It would be nice if, in five years, someone could come up with a *Dragon* or a *Youngblood*, go to Marvel and have it co-exist in the Marvel Universe alongside Spider-Man, yet they could still retain ownership. There is that at DC, to a degree. *Ms. Tree* and *The Butcher* are owned by their creators. There was a point when I was talking to DC about doing *Dragon*," he reveals, "but I could be kicked off the book any time.

"If I have an argument with an editor [at Marvel] about *The Dragon's* direction, if anybody gets fired, it *won't* be the editor."

He cites a recent Marvel incident. "What I wanted to do in my Sinister Six story [*Spider-Man* #18-23] didn't quite work out. The original idea was basically every time Spider-Man fights guys like the Sinister Six, he goes out after them alone and somehow wins. I wanted to do a story where Spider-Man goes out alone, gets the crap kicked out of him, goes after them again, gets the crap kicked out of him, and comes to the realization that, 'I'm fighting a team of my worst enemies! What am I doing? This is nuts! I'm going to get a team of my own and kick the crap outta them!'

"What ended up happening is they said, 'You can use Ghost Rider in parts one, five and six, but *not* in the middle ones. Originally, it was Spider-Man getting 'The New Fantastic Four' back together—Spider-Man, Hulk, Wolverine and Ghost Rider, but I couldn't use Wolverine.

"So, I wanted to do a Wolverine robot. The end of the second-to-last part would be Wolverine turning around and slicing up one of the good guys, and it would be, 'Oh shit, he's on the other side!' But they still said, 'No'."

Instead, Larsen shocked Spidey fans by resurrecting Gog, last seen in 1971's *Amazing Spider-Man* #104. "That was a good shock," he cackles. "I wanted the 'Oh shit!' factor, where you would turn to the last page and go, 'Oh shit!' Like, 'Things look bad for Spider-Man now,' but on the last page, they got worse! Gog is here!"

In his recent writing stint on *Spider-Man*, Larsen filled the series with wisecracks and in-jokes. Mary Jane asks Peter why his mask suddenly has "big ol' " eyes like Felix the Cat? "That was one of those lines of dialogue that popped into my head," Larsen states. "That's a definite tip of the hat to Toddy [McFarlane].

"I like Todd and I'm as much a comics-reading geek as anybody. Did Spidey's eyes actually change, or is it just a different artist? I decided they had changed. Are those the same webs that he has always had, are they a different type of webbing or are they being drawn differently?"

Larsen's sayonara to Spidey comes when "I ink a story over Ron Frenz for *Spider-Man* #26, the 30th anniversary of Spider-Man. Each Spider-book will have an anniversary." Each story is supposed to be a landmark event in the wall-crawler's life.

"I know what's happening in *Amazing*, but I'm not supposed to say," he says coyly. "I remember the old 30th anniversary story they were gonna do. [Writer David] Michelinie and I talked about it a little bit. Peter Parker would take off his mask in the *Daily Bugle*, say, 'I'm Spider-Man' and *not* have a secret identity anymore, which would have really mixed things up."

Readers used to Larsen's fun writing style on *Spider-Man* may be surprised by his new approach. "*The Dragon* won't be as jokey as *Spider-Man*," he cautions. "Some people may expect it to be as light-hearted as my other stuff. There will be some of that, but this character *isn't* the joke-a-minute-type guy. He's hot a clown; he's more of a straight superhero."

Will *The Savage Dragon* feature any "message" stories as other Image books are planning? "He would be a perfect character to do racism stories with, because he's green all of the time," Larsen speculates. "It's really going to

(continued on page 67)

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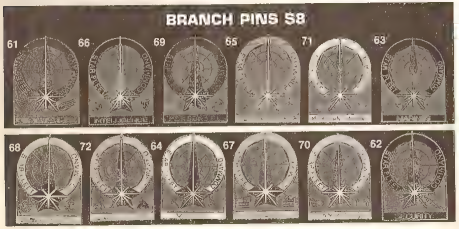

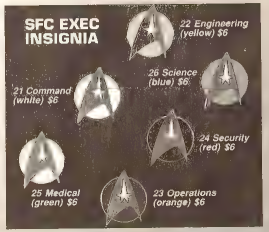

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New Anatomy Lessons

Down Louisiana way, Nancy Collins grows her own strain of Swamp Thing.

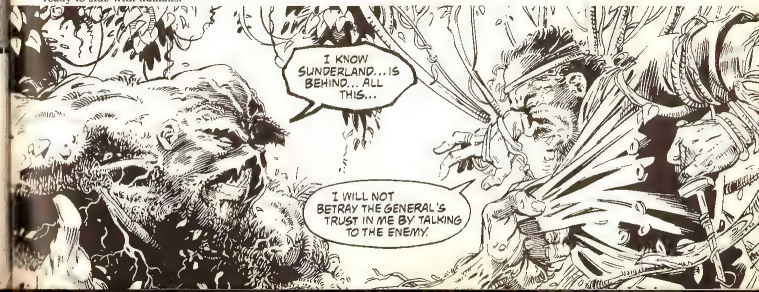
By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

After his creation by Len Wein and Berni Wrightson and his rebirth at the hands of Alan Moore in London, Nancy A. Collins has returned *Swamp Thing* to the Louisiana roots that they both share.

The acclaimed author of *Sunglasses After Dark* says her Swamp Thing is, in some ways, a kinder, gentler Thing than his predecessors: "I tried to make him a bit more laidback. Right now, he's Mr. Mom in many ways, enjoying his time with his family and friends. He's becoming more at peace with his surroundings instead of constantly brooding. The brooding element will always be with Swamp Thing, though!" she laughs.

Collins got the job of scripting *Swamp Thing*, her first comics work, "by accident." When DC began looking for a new writer, editor Stuart Moore, who also worked for St. Martin's Press, suggested they try a horror writer. DC approached Joe R. Lansdale. He was too busy to do a monthly title, but recommended Collins.

Nancy Collins' Swamp Thing is "less ready to side with humans."



Swamp Thing learns some new anatomy lessons in Collins' upcoming storyline.

"Stuart read *Sunglasses After Dark*, then called and asked me. It also helped that I knew something about the character and had been reading comics for several years," she says. "I sent in a sample script and some plot proposals, and I ended up landing the job on the strength of the plot proposals, and the fact that I live down here!

"Being familiar with the setting that your characters live in is always a big plus," she says. "Alan Moore tried, but I don't think he had ever been down here. Steve Bissette made some trips down here to take photographs and just get the feel of it. I think my being here for 10 years managed to give me a certain way of looking at potential storylines that people living elsewhere obviously would lack."

Her take on *Swamp Thing* offers unique personal savvy: "I know cajun and creole folklore, and how people actually live down here," she explains. "Being a woman, I can put a different interpretation into Swamp Thing and Abby's marriage, and the way they've been raising the child, since I have so many young nieces and nephews."

The character's past has undergone a few revisions over the years, but Collins is keeping faith with Alan Moore's interpretation. "It makes more sense for Swamp Thing to be an elemental, although he's an elemental who still retains the pretension of humanity, and all that it means. I'm making the character less ready to side with humans each time."

From her perspective as a novice comics scribe, Collins says she's most interested in the way the artists interpret her work.

"Sometimes they draw things that I didn't say were there, but it's a collaboration. Whatever works for them story-wise is what they should do. Sometimes it isn't how I think it should look. Other times, it's much better," she says, noting that everything balances out.

"There are some drawbacks to collaboration, especially since I've never met any of my artists, except for, briefly, [inker] Kim DeMulder. Every now and again, I'll call them up or they'll call me up if they need research material. I've been working with [artist] Scot Eaton, and every six weeks or so, I'll call him and say, 'I really like what you're doing. If you need any help with research or anything, let me know.' Basically, it's keeping lines of communication open."

After growing up in the South and spending the last 10 years in New Orleans, Collins is moving to New York this summer, but she says the Swamp Thing won't accompany her to the Big Apple.

"Amongst other things, he's going to end up in Transylvania," she notes. "When we do our 20th anniversary in issue #125, we're taking it all back to Castle Arcane. We're bringing Arcane back in yet another format, and opening up another storyline that'll be resolved over the next couple of years."

A new elemental called Lady Jane, a governess sent by the Parliament of Trees to teach Tefe how to use her powers, was introduced in issues #119-120. A three-part tale follows, featuring the students from Tulane University seen during the "Swamp Thing for Governor" story. When they're caught vandalizing equipment from the Sunderland Corporation, Swamp Thing comes to their aid, in a story that introduces a new villain.

"Connie Sunderland is the general's daughter, and she's going to be taking over the Sunderland Corporation," Collins says. "She's just as bad as her old man, if not worse, because she's younger!

"The three-issue 'Needleman' story features a doctor who went through school on a scholarship from the Sunderland Corporation, with the understanding that he would perform certain services for them—in other words, act as a hired assassin, doing discreet removal. There will also be a cross-burning on Chester's front lawn. I've also introduced an interracial gay couple, and we'll see the problems that come with that."

Collins doesn't want to be tied into *Swamp Thing*'s world for too long.

Following the anniversary will be a two-part, year-long storyline.

"The first half involves a creature created by the Sunderland Corporation called Proteus, who basically eats toxic waste. It started off as a virus, but infects a human host and goes wandering off on its own. Swamp Thing's going to chase it across the United States, and his decision to do that will cause marital trouble between Abby and him, because she doesn't want him to leave. He ends up deceiving her to take care of this," Collins explains.

"Also, Tefe is going to be experimenting with her powers. In the script I've just finished, she's grown her own friends, little anthropomorphic daisies that walk around. They're not terribly bright, and they look like cartoon daisies, except they're carnivorous, and eventually get out of hand!"

Soon, there will also be guest appearances. *Hellblazer* John Constantine will appear, though *Sandman* won't be dropping by. "I can use Matthew the Raven whenever I want, but there's only so much a bird can do," she laughs.

Her New Orleans surroundings have contributed to previous *Swamp Thing* sagas, including the Mardi Gras issue and the "Swamp Thing for Governor" story, which was inspired by the David Duke election.

"Living in the belly of the beast helps," Collins says, "mainly because Louisiana is one of the most apathetic areas you can live in. People are willing to tolerate *anything* just so they can get by. To some extent, being laidback is OK, and that's one thing I want to stress in my stories. Many of these people are laidback, but they're not stupid—I don't want to have stereotypical Southerners. I also want to make a distinction between the cajun culture and the culture that exists in the area's cities. One problem I do have with my artists is that they do tend to draw the cajuns barefoot. They're not barefoot. They wear those white plastic galoshes—to church, if they have to!"

Despite her New York move, *Swamp Thing* won't become more urban in its attitudes. "That obviously wasn't the case with Alan Moore when he was writing the strip. He was living in London, and you can't get much more urban than that!" she says. "I've lived here long enough. I'm steeped in this culture. It's not like I

This cutesy-daisy will definitely "get out of hand" in *Swamp Thing*, Collins warns.

can't just call up someone and get a dose of New Orleans any time I like!"

In addition to *Swamp Thing*, Nancy Collins still writes horror novels (which she discussed in FANGORIA #102). Her latest, *In the Blood*, is a sequel to her acclaimed *Sunglasses After Dark*. Comparing the forms, she says some stories work better in comic books.

"Obviously, serials work best as comics. One-shots can be done, but it's very hard for people to develop an interest in them," she says. "In the long run, serials are basically the easiest. It's like TV! People develop an identification with the characters.

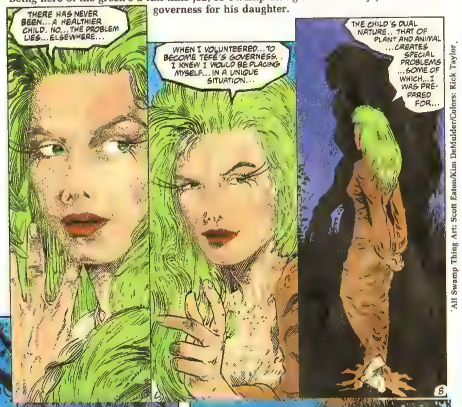
"Writing *Swamp Thing*, in many ways, is like writing a bunch of short stories or novellas about the same people. That's something I'm familiar with, so it wasn't that difficult."

In addition to writing more novels, Collins plans to expand her comics work. "I have a couple of mini-series proposals at DC, and when I'm through with *Swamp Thing*, I can probably move on to another series."

She has limited her tenure on *Swamp Thing* because she doesn't want to grow stale with the characters: "I'm contracted for another year, but I don't intend to stay with it forever. Two years on *Swamp Thing* is the most I could do without going crazy, because he's a difficult character to write about. It's difficult to have believable conflict when your character can solve it in a panel. Basically, it's the Superman problem."

Despite her impending farewell, Nancy Collins says she retains an affection for the plant elemental: "I like Swamp Thing, and I try to portray him as someone who knows what he's capable of doing. He's self-confident, and he doesn't have to prove himself to anybody. He's a man's man—even if he is a plant!" FA

Being hero of the green's a full-time job, so Swamp Thing takes on Lady Jane as a new governess for his daughter.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All Swamp Thing Art: Scott Eaton/Kim DeMulder/Colors: Rick Taylor.

"The brooding element will always be with Swamp Thing," promises the author.

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Art: Ian Montgomery/Brad Vancata/Colors: Rick Taylor

Grant Morrison isn't just interested in the weird—the strange, too.

By JOE NAZZARO

When last encountered (CS #12), then 29-year-old Glasgow native Grant Morrison had just begun to rock the mainstream-comics boat with strange and quirky books like *Animal Man*, *Doom Patrol* and the ground-breaking *Arkham Asylum*, created by Morrison and artist Dave McKean.

During a visit to New York, the now-thirtysomething writer addresses some of his past efforts and looks ahead. The word "normal" rarely enters the conversation.

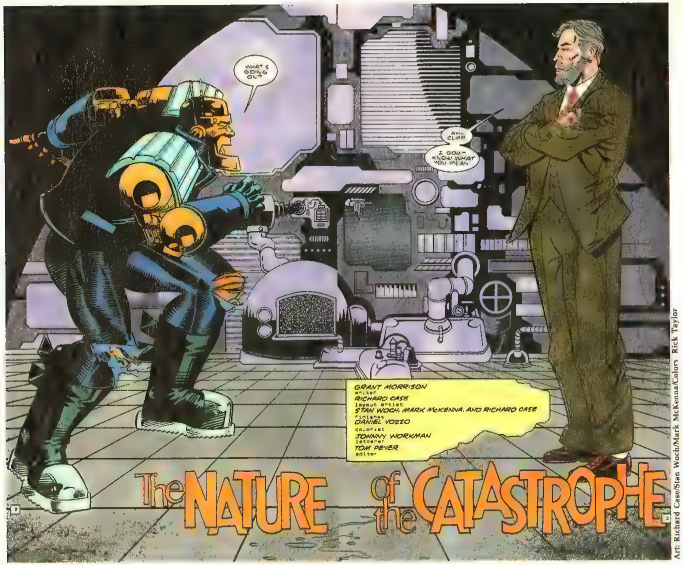
Morrison now considers *Arkham Asylum* a milestone in his development as a writer. What effect did this journey into the dark side of the DC Universe have on his career? "Quite a lot," he avows. "I was suddenly elevated into a higher rank of recognition. I could be more of a prima donna than I had been.

"Also, it was a watershed for me, because I think I finally found my own voice in comics. Up until then, in early *Animal Mans* for instance, I was still doing what I thought was expected of British writers, which was to be as much like Alan Moore as possible. It was that post-*Watchmen*, realistic superheroes kind of thing. After that, I started to realize what *I* wanted to do, and that bled over into *Doom Patrol* and what happened later in *Animal Man*. For me, it was significant in that way."

Reminded of his final months on *Animal Man*, Morrison smiles mischievously as he recalls the dire straits in which he left his replacement, writer Peter Milligan. It was, after all, difficult to follow Rip Hunter, the Phantom Stranger, Streaky the Supercat, the Inferior Five and Grant Morrison. "I tried to make it almost *impossible* for someone else to do the book," he confirms, "because I wanted to give the next writer a hard time. The whole thing was planned from issue #5, which was when I decided to do that stuff. It sounds mildly pretentious, but I wanted to do a post-modern comic. American novelists were introducing the idea of the author as part of the work. I wanted to do a comic that reflected that. I also had a heritage in comics to follow, because we used to have stories where the Flash would meet up with Cary Bates and Julie Schwartz. I wanted to apply some contemporary techniques to it."

Photo: By & Copyright 1992 Albert L. Ortega

Grant Morrison, a.k.a. "The Weird Man of Comics," has no plans "to abandon comics for something else."



Art: Richard Case/Stan Woch/Mark McKenna/Colors: Rick Taylor

Morrison says his final *Doom Patrol* storyline will be a most unpleasant one—for the team, that is.

But Morrison hasn't really continued his association with *Animal Man*. "I saw some of Pete Milligan's stuff," he confesses, "because Pete is a friend of mine, and I usually keep up with what he's doing. Other than that, I don't read *Animal Man* at all."

Another character who received the Morrison touch is Kid Eternity, who was featured in a three-issue limited series last year, written by Morrison and painted by Duncan Fegredo [CS #18]. The writer recalls, "DC came to me and said, 'We have this whole bunch of horrible old characters that no one's interested in. Do you want to do *Kid Eternity* and see if you can make something of it?'

"I thought of *Kid Eternity* as a '40s look at what it was like to be a teenager or young kid, but I couldn't repeat that, because the idea was no longer applicable to today's world. My idea was based on the modern American teenager—a more aimless, nihilistic, blank-generation youth. It was the same basic idea about a teenager, but a bit more up to date."

For Morrison, who has a deep interest in magic and the occult, one of the most appealing aspects of writing *Kid Eternity* was the chance to inject some of those ideas into the series. "I wanted to do something about magic which took into account all the theories about chaos," he explains, "because chaos magic is based on the idea that all matter and all manifestations are unfolded out of a primal chaos. It's too complex to get into now, but I was interested in the whole idea of chaos science. What I didn't like was the simplistic way in which order and chaos have been treated in DC comics. I tried to show some of that stuff in a different way."

Morrison was pleased with Duncan Fegredo's artistic contribution. "It was great. I like collaboration because what happens sometimes is what William Burroughs calls 'the third mind,' where two people get together and you get a gestalt that's completely unexpected. That's when the collaboration is working well. Many times, you don't get that kind of thing and it's disappointing, but fortunately in the case of *Kid Eternity*, Duncan is really good at what he does, and he was bringing something to it that was specifically his. We had a really good combination."

While Morrison enjoyed writing *Kid Eternity*, he admits that the chances of a follow-up series are remote. "DC has mentioned it and said, 'Would you like to do a regular comic?' But right now, Duncan and I don't want to do it.

"I wouldn't mind doing an annual, something like a movie series, where two years go by and we do another *Kid Eternity*."

Also uncertain is a third issue of Morrison's mini-series, *Steed and Mrs. Peel*, based on the popular British TV program *The Avengers*. "It was a joint production between Eclipse and Acme," the writer recounts, "which was a British company that has now gone bust. I knew the guys who ran Acme Comics. They approached me and said, 'Will you do

Art: Ian Montgomery/Brad Vancata

The writer admits his *Doom Force* one-shot takes "a few swipes" at books like *X-Force* and *X-Men*. "It's difficult not to."

this *Avengers* thing?' I said I really didn't want to do it, and then they bribed me by giving me a whole series of *Avengers* videotapes, so that's why I did it. I wanted to do a really good pastiche, something that would seem like one of the better Brian Clemens [scripted] episodes. For me, it was an exercise in how closely I could capture that.

"*The Avengers* always interested me, because—like *The Prisoner*—it seemed to be an expression of what I call English surrealism. There were programs in the '60s and '70s that had that kind of whimsical, distorted view of English life, and I liked that. I grew up watching that stuff, and it's influenced what I've done. It was a nostalgic thing for me to do.

"I did three issues of *Steed and Mrs. Peel*, but the third one still hasn't come out. It's a shame, because I would have liked to have gotten some royalties out of it, but there's nothing you can do; you just move on to the next thing."

A good deal of Morrison's energy is currently being devoted to *The Doom Patrol*, which he has transformed over several years into a cornerstone of weirdness in the DC Universe. As with *Animal Man*, Morrison plans to leave the book in the near future, but promises that few stones will be left standing after his departure. "My last issue will definitely be #63," he confirms. "In the last year of *Doom Patrol*, many things happen and a lot of people die. It cranks up the tension for the last year, and then there's a big apocalyptic finale."

Will things get even stranger for comic's most bizarre super team? "Not really. I went to the limit with the last storyline. Now, I want to put my foot on the throttle, straight down; take no prisoners. Compared to the other stuff I've done, it's probably more of an accessible storyline; not as *outre*, as *avant garde*. I just want to concentrate on the characters' personalities, and because I'm wrapping things up, many fairly unexpected things happen. It will be exciting.

"In this last story, everything that has been unexplained or left up in the air is finally pulled together. From now on, every splash page at the end of every issue has some horrifying, unpleasant event in it. Only *one* of the characters I've been using will survive into the book's next incarnation."

Pondering the reputation that *Doom Patrol* has of being a somewhat unusual book, Morrison smiles, as though hearing something he has heard many times before. "It's something that I'm always aware of," comes the dry response. "It does baffle me, because I think that *Doom*

All Doom Patrol & Doom Force Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1993 DC Comics Inc.

Despite "some bizarre concepts in it," Morrison sees *Doom Patrol* as "a fairly straightforward comic."

Art: Ken Steacy

With "And Men Shall Call Him Hero," Morrison honored comics legends Stan Lee and Jack Kirby.

Patrol is actually a fairly straightforward comic. It has some bizarre concepts in it, but everything is usually explained. It's fairly linear, and things happen one after the other; if they're strange things, that's what you're paying your money for."

While many authors of team titles have a particular character they enjoy writing, Morrison admits that he has difficulty in choosing a *Doom Patrol* favorite. "The core group, which is Cliff Steele, Rebus and Crazy Jane—they're all characters with whom I'm really fascinated. Crazy Jane maybe has the edge because I created her, and the character is so adaptable.

"What interests me about the character is that, psychologically, there's so much that can be done with her. I'm not really interested in the fact that she has 64 different superpowers, which is the most boring aspect. For me, it's the whole personality thing: She's someone who can change her personality with every sentence. The superpower thing is a hassle."

Before starting his final *Doom Patrol* storyline, Morrison couldn't resist doing a quick change-of-pace for one issue. The story, "And Men Shall Call Him Hero," which appeared in *Doom Patrol* #53, was actually a homage to some early Marvel Comics, particularly the classic Stan Lee/Jack Kirby *Fantastic Four* adventures. "That came about because somebody was behind on the book, and [editor] Tom Peyer said, 'Can we have an inventory issue just in case we lose some time? Do anything you want; maybe concentrate on one of the characters.' So, I did a Stan and Jack tribute, and I had a great time doing it. It got me out of the way I had been thinking."

The feedback on Morrison's Lee/Kirby tribute was positive. "People seemed to like it," the writer declares. Then, with a touch of irony, he adds, "The worst thing was that everybody said, 'If only *Doom Patrol* was like that every month!'

"What I had been trying to do with *Doom Patrol* all along was to do a comic that had the same level of imagination as the comics I enjoyed, like *The Fantastic Four* or the John Broome *Flash*, which had really brilliant concepts. I just wanted to see how long I could keep doing that nonstop. I've finally reached the end of that, so it's time to wrap it up."

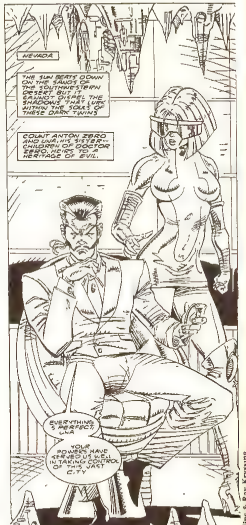
Morrison's next project will be *Doom Force*, a one-issue special (due out this month) that shows what might happen to the *Doom Patrol* characters in the not-too-distant future, while also taking a few good-natured shots at Marvel's myriad of mutant books. "The idea was to show something of the Doom Patrol that might come after me once I've finished," Morrison explains. "We created this whole bunch of new characters called Doom Force, and what we wanted was to make it look as if this comic had fallen through another dimension one year in the future. While it doesn't really relate to anything, it may well be that a year from now, we may do a *Doom Force* series.

"Because I had been writing a fairly experimental superhero comic for the last few years, people expect a certain thing. With Alan Moore for instance, after doing *Watchmen*, where else was there for him to go but to personal projects about life in Northampton? I really didn't want to go that route, but I think that's what's expected of me. What we've done is a real straight-up, 57-page action-adventure comic. Again, it does take a few swipes at things like *X-Force* and the current *X-Men*. It's difficult not to."

Morrison has several projects in the works, all of which will wait a bit. "Immediately after I finish *Doom Patrol*," he reveals, "I'm going on holiday to try and recharge the batteries. I just want to come back with some new thoughts. I've been doing this fairly solidly for the last couple of years. If you're writing on the run, you begin to fall back into your old ways of doing things. You develop certain techniques. What I want to do is take a break for a while and come back with a fresh approach.

"One of the things I'll be doing when I come back is six issues of *Animal Man* again. I wasn't going to

(continued on page 66)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Art: Paris Cullins & Ray Kryssing

***Doom Force* debuts not only the potential superheroes of the not-too-distant future, but some of their Rogues' Gallery as well.**

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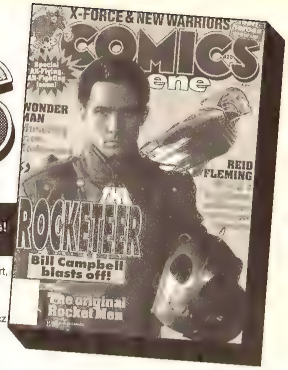

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Warrior

(continued from page 28)

and how they would affect the world around them. If someone like the Harbinger kids or X-O Manowar [CS #24] showed up, the media would drop everything, election news and all, to cover the appearance of a real live superhero. We've been keeping very close control over our continuity to keep that feeling. Anything that happens in one book affects the others, if only very subtly, so we have the artists, writers, colorists and other creative personnel involved as much as we can.

"At Marvel, I felt I had a lot to contribute, but in such a big place, they tend to pigeonhole you. They have so many people working on each book, and so many editors working on several books at a time, that they can't coordinate the way we can. We tend to be very tough on our creative people that way, but everyone's input is welcome and listened to. For instance, we had everyone in the office help plot *Unity*, from artists and writers to our sales and promotions staffs. It's really a team effort; it makes Valiant a very different company to work for. When you're doing 60 or 80 books a month, employing hundreds just to get titles released, you can't have everyone get together and pool their ideas like that; it would never work. But here, we can do it, and we do."

Ultimately, she says, she would love to do risky, potentially unprofitable books, but Valiant would first have to establish itself more solidly.

"We have an idea that we're doing very well, but not well enough to take wild chances," Jackson affirms. "Yet, it's my idea that Jim would love to do very different projects. I can't wait until we can do a horror book; some of my favorite books are non-mainstream, things that don't have a strong commercial angle, but are artistic and innovative. I grew up on books like *Creepy* and *Eerie*, all the stuff that shocked my mother; I never knew until later that the stories I liked best were ones by great creators like Archie Goodwin, Esteban Maroto, Berni Wrightson and others. Those stories are the ones that stuck with me, and I would love to do a book with more stories like those.

"I love working in comics," Janet Jackson says. "I've met so many interesting, creative people in this business. A handful aren't happy. They think comics aren't grown up enough or something. I think this is a terrific industry, and Valiant's the best company I've worked for—I'm proud of the things we're accomplishing here now, and the things we're going to do."

Ren & Stimpy

(continued from page 12)

Stimpy is based on "the greatest Stooge of them all." Larry Fine. If you don't believe Smith, just "Ask Dr. Stupid."

as to what's a good cartoon and what's a bad one. Then, when a guy comes in screaming and frothing at the mouth, you think he's insane and call for ushers to throw him out. Now, of course, all those people are coming back to us, hat in hand, begging John to come back." He smiles wickedly. " '*Please* do a show for us!,' they say, and John laughs and says: 'I *showed* you the show—I *pitched* it to you!' They're whimpering now."

Camp continues, "Corporate America is just one facet of an overall symptom. Unimaginative people are in charge of companies, and anybody under them that has any kind of idea or brains gets thrown out, and all they end up with is a lot of yes-men and ass-kissers. It's the Peter Principle in action. A guy wrote a book about it in the '60s. Look it up in your local library [*The Peter Principle* suggests employees keep getting promoted until they reach their level of incompetence]. Now, about my storyboarding theories."

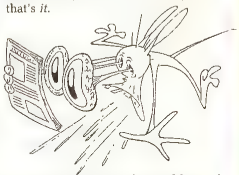
What was that about storyboarding theories? Camp grins. "Here's my advice to storyboard artists everywhere. Quit looking at Japanese cartoons! Don't look at *any* more Japanese cartoons! If you do, I'm going to *hit* you! And: Simple is always better. Also, go out, buy a gun and kill all the writers. Let the cartoonists do it!"

Smith looks at him in alarm, and Camp puts up a placating hand. "No, I don't *really* mean that! But it's true that there are many writers out there who are so in love with the spoken word that they'll write"—he closes his eyes and starts quoting, singsong—" '*Millions upon millions of people come over the hill riding lobsters. Suddenly, the ground explodes, and thousands and thousands of aliens and...*' That's easy to *write*, but—" He shakes his head.

"When I worked on *Tiny Toons*, I would get these 19-20 page scripts jammed full of dialogue." He nods toward Jim Smith. "Here, *we* write four- or five-page outlines, and the *artists* come up with the dialogue. We have a rule: You can't write for the show unless you can draw. When we're done writing, when the show's all written, we all get up from our writing desks, go sit down at a drawing table, and start storyboarding."

Jim Smith nods. "*Everybody* contributes ideas!"

"It's like the old Warner Bros. 'Termite Terrace' gag sessions," Camp adds. "Those cartoons, *really good* ones, were written by cartoonists—which is as it should be. We have five writers: Me, Vincent Waller, Rich Purcel, Elinor Blake and John—that's *it*.



Ren owes his voice to John Kricfalusi and Peter Lorre, "the best, weaseliest little-evil-guy voice ever," says Bob Camp.

"People ask me: 'Are you a writer?' and I say, 'Well, I'm a cartoonist who writes.' Saying you're a writer could mean *anything*. It's like saying you're an artist. You could stick sweet potatoes up your butt and call yourself a performance artist."

Smith and Camp both grimace. "But a cartoonist is a specific thing. It's a clean word. This year, I get to direct too—so now I'm writing, storyboarding and directing all my own cartoons! I'm even doing voices in all of them! It takes some of the load off John, who has been doing everything!

"It's hard work, but a lot of fun! John is the world's biggest perfectionist; anything less than perfect plus is no good—which is cool because it makes everybody do their best."

However you put it, *Ren and Stimpy* is the "in" show of the year, a show in which the SPUMCO gang takes pride.

Jim Smith shakes his head, smiling. "Hey, I've said all I can say—let the cartoons speak for themselves!"

Bob Camp nods in agreement. "Amen to that!"

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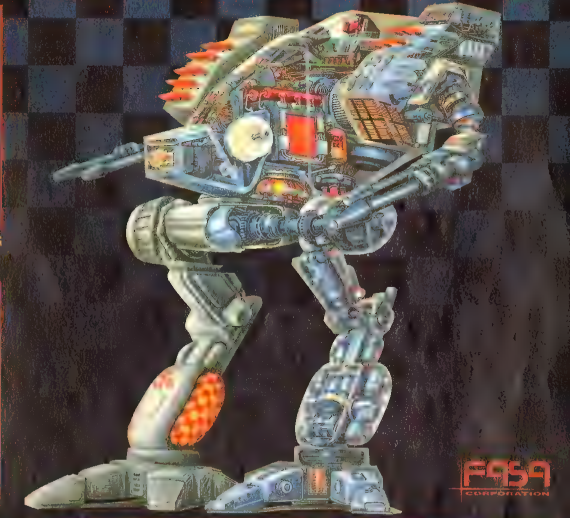

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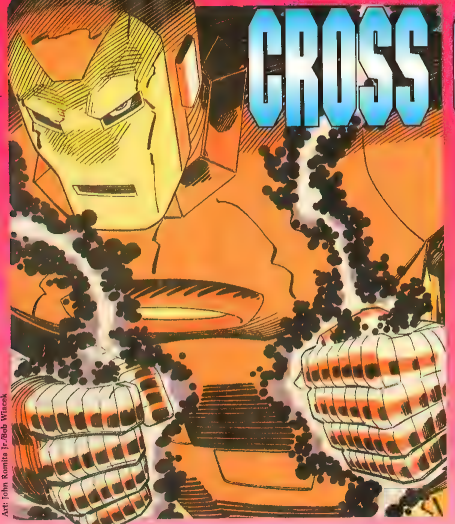


Art: John Romita Jr. Bob Wiacek

Filmmaker Stuart Gordon won't let the Iron Man movie rust in peace.

By PAT JANKIEWICZ

Marvel Comics' heroes have never quite clicked in Hollywood. OK, Hulk was a hit, but Spider-Man, Captain America, Dr. Strange, Thor, Howard the Duck, Punisher and Daredevil were all disappointments.

Still, they're luckier than most Marvel heroes. Take the case of Tony Stark: With the exception of a '60s cartoon—in which *Animal House*'s John Vernon voiced "the cool exec with a heart of steel"—Iron Man has been virtually ignored by Tinseltown. He's one of Marvel's longest-running characters, and still appears in three books a month—his own title and two *Avengers*. He has his own action figure from Toy Biz. And *Terminator 2* director James Cameron has professed that as a child, he wanted "to grow up and draw Iron Man." Nevertheless, the Golden Avenger is currently rusting in peace.

One filmmaker has been trying to get Iron Man onto the silver screen. On the wall of Stuart Gordon's office is a framed Iron Man poster by Moebius with the inscription "To Stupendous Stu, Much Admiration, Excelsior! Stan Lee."

"I've been working on an Iron Man film, trying to get that to happen, but it's kind of betwixt and between right now," the director of *Re-Animator* explains. "We originally wanted to do it with Universal, but we couldn't get a script that everybody agreed upon. An Iron Man movie still *might* happen."

Gordon may be the perfect director for the project, since his film *Robot Jox* was reminiscent of the classic Cold War Iron Man stories, where Shellhead squares off against Russian foes like the Crimson Dynamo in front of the media. (One Robotjock even makes like Ben Grimm and says, "It's clobberin' time!")

"That's true," Gordon laughs. "There are some similarities. I was very influenced by Marvel Comics. Through *Iron Man*, I've gotten to know Stan Lee, which has been a great treat. It's wonderful to get into story conferences with him because he knows his characters so well.

"Stan's like a kid; he gets excited about things and builds upon them. You'll toss out an idea, and that will inspire Stan to come up with an even better one, which is nice. Stan's very positive. You get many guys who say, 'This is no good and that's no good,' but Stan never says that. After awhile, you realize that when he doesn't like an idea, you have to coax him into saying it."

Recently, Iron Man was scrapped in a way Ultimo, the Mandarin and the Melter could never have dreamed of: He was sent into turnaround.

"Universal, for cost-saving measures, had all these projects in development, and basically dumped 300 of them," Gordon says sadly. "Part of the problem with Iron Man was we couldn't come up with a script that satisfied them.

"I also think *The Rocketeer* had a negative effect," he states. "If *Rocketeer* had been a more successful film, it would have helped *Iron Man*. It worried Universal because they saw it as too similar."

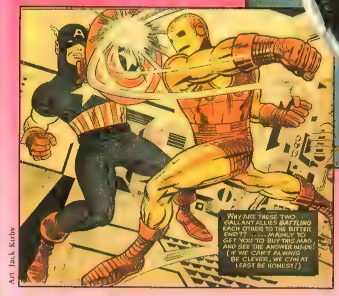
The Rocketeer's helmet even resembles one of Iron Man's earlier headpieces from the comics. "It really does," Gordon concurs. "Developing a suit that can make you fly is basically the same idea. But I felt Iron Man had many other things to offer that *The Rocketeer* didn't. Tony Stark needs the suit in order to live, and that makes him more vulnerable—which is one of the things *The Rocketeer* lacked. You were never concerned about the hero.

His plans may have eroded for now, but filmmaker Stuart Gordon still hopes to forge *Iron Man* on the silver screen.

"He seemed to be just the same at the end as in the beginning. In a good movie, the hero should learn or go through something; he has to change, to take the audience somewhere.

"You can't really get too upset when a project gets put into turnaround because just about every successful movie was in turnaround, including *E.T.* and *Star Wars*. Many times, a company will throw the baby out with the bathwater."

Gordon feels very protective of his baby. "*Iron Man* was a project I had been talking about for several years, and I finally found somebody who liked the idea. We went to Marvel Comics, where they agreed to license it to us for an option, with the condition that Stan would be involved to make sure we were faithful to the comics, and do an adaptation Marvel would be proud of. I welcomed that and thought it would be great.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AVENGE THE ART YOU TO BUY THIS MAN! I'VE GOT A FEELING I'VE WE CAN'T ALWAYS BE CLEVER, WE CAN AT LEAST BE HONEST.)

Art: Jack Kirby

Gordon once planned to have Shellhead's armor for the *Iron Man* movie resemble this Jack Kirby '60s rendition.

Art: Bob Larkin

If Gordon's *Iron Man* movie ever happens, it won't matter which costume he wears, but "you have to have all of the repulsor rays."

"What I like about Iron Man is that Tony Stark is a very wealthy man, but he has bad health. It's the old idea that 'There are some things money cannot buy.' There's a vulnerability about him. He has got this bad heart and Iron Man began as a way to keep his heart beating regularly, then it eventually metamorphoses into this suit that he can wear which gives him super powers.

"It's a wonderful fantasy," Gordon notes. "The idea that anyone who puts on this suit can fly and lift up bulldozers. To do these great things is amazing, but at the same time, you have a man in the suit whose heart could fail at any second. It gives him an Achilles heel, which makes him an interesting hero."

As for casting Stark, "I never settled on a final person, but the direction we were going was that Iron Man had retired and stopped being Iron Man. As in the comics, he has become an alcoholic, and then he must put on the suit and become Iron Man again. We were thinking it would be great to get someone like Clint Eastwood or Paul Newman, as kind of an older hero, as opposed to a younger guy."

The film's story will be epic. "I'll be working with the writer, I don't think I would write it myself. [*RoboCop* co-author] Michael Miner was involved, but Michael wanted to take it in a completely different direction, one that didn't really work for me. I had been working with Stan and [comics writer] Roy Thomas, developing a scenario together.

"Roy brought a lot of Iron Man lore to the project," Gordon declares. "He's really familiar with Marvel, of course. He brought back the character of Obadiah Stane, some of the backstories and Rhodey [Tony Stark's bodyguard]. Rhodey will definitely be in it. Generally, we're getting back to the comic."

Like most superhero films, this one would retell Iron Man's origin. But there's a problem with a faithful rendering of those events—they're dated. Tony Stark's story began in Vietnam. "We decided not to get into that," Gordon explains. "Our story was that the stress of running Stark Industries gets to Tony Stark and he has a major heart attack. This is brought about by his rival trying a corporate takeover. We were talking about making [the rival] Stane from the comics, which was Roy's idea. Of course, in the Marvel tradition, Stane turns out to have been a pawn of some other great villain."

Gordon wanted a foe who would thrill audiences from here to Latveria. "We were developing different villains, although the one I wanted to use was Dr. Doom. I always thought

THERE! IT'S FINISHED!
TEST 1
ALL THAT REMAINS TO BE DONE IS TO REMOVE MY ARMOR...
IF I FAIL... LET ME DIE WITH VALOR!
THIS IS SO TUNNEL-BACK, SON. EVERY EFFORT DEPENDS ON THE MASTER TRANSMISSION!
I'M WORKING SO FAR BUT I CONTINUE TO NEED TO START BEATING IT!
ONLY A FEW MINUTES ARE LEFT! I'LL SURVIVE BUT I MAY HAVE SUCCEEDED!
I DID IT. I PASSED THE TIME LIMIT.
TONY STARK CAN LIVE AGAIN!

Art: Dan Reschlick Ayers

All Iron Man Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1964, 1979, 1991, 1992 Marvel Entertainment Group

"I think the Iron Man suit is what it's really about," says Gordon of the comic.

he would be the perfect nemesis for Iron Man. Unfortunately, Dr. Doom had been sold to another producer along with the Fantastic Four, so he wasn't available.

"We cooked up our own villain. We gave him several different names; at one point, we were calling him Doctor Death. It was the idea of a guy who had been destroyed and rebuilt himself, like Dr. Doom.

"It's important that you have a villain who's equal or better, in terms of power, to your hero. If you have a worthy adversary, all the better. Alfred Hitchcock used to say, 'The better the villain, the better the movie.' I think that's good advice."

Such artists as Jack Kirby, Moebius and Bob Layton have created distinctive Iron Man outfits—so which style did the filmmaker have in mind for the movies? "The script starts with the origin of Iron Man, and we wanted to start with the really old, original Iron Man suit, which looked like Robby the Robot, and have it develop into something more like the [present] one in the comic. He'll computerize it with all sorts of microtechnology, and refine it to make it much more compact."

While the film versions of *Captain America* and *The Punisher* dumped their uniforms, Gordon intends to adhere to the comic. "I think the Iron Man suit is what it's really about; it would have to be there. You have to make the suit believable, so the audience accepts him."

The director also intends to let Iron Man retain his gadgets from the comic. "Oh yeah," he smiles. "You have to have all of the repulsor rays, but again, you would have to make it believable to an audience. You have to sell the technology and make the suit seem really possible."

(continued on page 66)

Matters of "Warp"

Stuart Gordon already has one superhero epic under his belt, the cult play trilogy *Warp*. "It was truly inspired by Marvel Comics," he says. "At one point, we were thinking of getting their permission to do adaptations of Marvel Comics' heroes on stage, but it was too expensive and too difficult. We decided to come up with our own comic book and do it for the stage.

"*Warp* was influenced by some of my favorite comics. In addition to Iron Man, I like Dr. Strange and Thor a lot. The idea of interdimensional battles with godlike powers was something I thought would be very theatrical. We did *Warp* as three full-length plays. It followed the adventures of a bank teller who discovers that he's actually Lord Cumulus, Defender of the Universe.

"We did it a little more comedically than the Marvel Comics," he relates. "There's a villain called Chaos, Prince of Madness, who wants to destroy the Universe. Cumulus can't figure this out. He says, 'Well, where is he gonna live?' "

Artist Mike Kaluta adapted the play for First Comics in the early '80s. "It was nice when they did the *Warp* comics, because it went full-circle: Inspired by comics, it eventually became one.

Unfortunately, First was just starting out and many people weren't aware of them. The comic books are OK, but they left out much of the comedy. They played it a little too straight."

As for the possibility of *Warp* making it to the big screen, Gordon announces, "I've been talking to people, trying to get that to happen. I hope it does, because I think it would make a wonderful film."

There were tentative plans with Michael Grais and Mark Victor, screenwriters of *Poltergeist* and *Cool World* and producers of *Sleepwalkers*. "They tried to get it together for a long time, but couldn't get it off the ground. That's one project that would make a terrific movie," says Gordon.

"If there is a movie, I would like to be involved with it. I'm one of the co-authors of the stage play, with Linda Kleinfeld. I would love to direct it. *Warp* is exciting, has action and is funny as well."

—*Pat Jankiewicz*

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BIG OL' HEAVY CRATE
9 OUTRAGEOUS SNEAKER BILL.
8 WEIRD HEAD THINGS MAKE WEARING A CRASH HELMET LOOK REALLY STUPID
7 FRIENDS ALWAYS WANTING YOU TO MOVE THEIR STUFF.
YOU COULD MOVE ALL THIS JUNK IN ABOUT 2 MINUTES!
THIS SIDE UP
6 THE HASSLE YOU GO THROUGH EVERY TIME YOU ENTER THE NEW YORK CITY MARATHON.
UNFAIR! FLASH IS TOO FAST
HE'S WON 5 TIMES IN A ROW! NO FAIR!!
5 SUPERMAN ALWAYS WANTING TO RACE TO SEE WHO'S FASTER.
OKAY, BEST TWO OUT OF THREE. C'MON, GIVE ME ANOTHER CHANCE!
WHIMPER
WHINE
WAHOO!
4 FINDING OUT YOUR EVIL TWIN IS ON THE LOOSE AGAIN.
WELL, IF YOU DIDN'T BUY 4,000 POUNDS OF DYNAMITE, THEN WHO DID?!
BILL 4,000 LBS. OF T.N.T.
BOB'S MUNITIONS MART
3 STUPID SUPER-VILLAINS.
I, JELLY MASTER, SHALL SMOTHER YOU IN A VAT OF MARMALADE!!
2 ACCIDENTLY VIBRATING INTO ANOTHER UNIVERSE WHERE EVERYBODY WORSHIPS ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER.
COMMANDO IS THE GREATEST MOVIE EVER MADE.
ARNOLD FOR PRESIDENT.
ALL GOODNESS COMES FROM ARNOLD.
I LIKE ARNOLD, BUT THIS IS RIDICULOUS!
1 BUGS.
END

Iron Man

(continued from page 64)

Special FX weren't even considered during the project's tenure at Universal ("We never got that far"), but the filmmaker does have builders in mind for Tony Stark's iron underoos. "I would like to use many of the same people from *Robot Jox*. I feel they did an outstanding job."

Iron Man's appearance in any potential movie may be rather unusual. "[Artist] Neal Adams designed a new Iron Man suit," Gordon reveals. "The thing that's great about Neal is that he designs things so they could work. One of his big problems with Iron Man is that the armor suit folds into a briefcase. When Tony Stark puts on the suit, what happens to the briefcase? That was something I never thought about. Does he leave the briefcase there? What Neal did was incorporate the briefcase *into* the costume. It becomes a part of his costume, which I thought was ingenious."

As a reader, Gordon enjoyed Marvel Comics for their verisimilitude. "I always loved that in *Dr. Strange*, at the end of some great adventure, where he has just saved the universe from Dormammu, he would come back to New York, a cab would drive by, splash water all over him and the driver would yell, 'Get outta the street, ya freak!' Strange would always have that little thought bubble, 'If they only knew!' The idea that this guy saved all of us, we owe him our existence, and nobody knew about it was great."

Writing a comic book himself isn't beyond the realm of possibility. "I've been asked a couple of times to do it, and I think I may do that at some point," he grins. "But I like to read them more than write them!"

While there have been a number of writers attached to *Iron Man*, including *RoboCop*'s Miner, at one point Gordon brought in his fellow Empire Pictures' alumni, screenwriters Danny Bilson and Paul De Meo (who discussed *The Flash* and other projects in CS #26).

"We were doing *Iron Man*, but had to drop out to do *The Flash*," Danny Bilson says. Paul De Meo relates, "Our story started with Tony Stark retired, as a bummed-out alcoholic. He hasn't been Iron Man for 10 years; he's 50 years old and becomes Iron Man again with a whole new suit."

While Stuart Gordon seems determined to bring *Iron Man* to a theater near you, is there any other comic character he would like to adapt? "Well," he states with a noncommittal grin, "I wouldn't mind seeing Doctor Strange brought to the screen!" CS

Morrison

(continued from page 58)

do it at first, but once Tom Veitch is finished, Jamie Delano will be taking over for six issues, and Tom Peyer said, 'Are you interested in doing a short run?' I thought it worked when Frank Miller came back to *Daredevil*, so it might be nice to come back and do six good *Animal Man* issues. That's something I'm looking forward to. I've got good ideas for that, and they're going to be very different from the stuff I did before. I'll probably start writing them at this year's end.

"Obviously, I'm still working for Fleetway with *2000 A.D.* I've also done a series [for DC], *Sebastian O*. It's based around the idea of what would happen if Oscar Wilde met *Die Hard*. It's set in this retro-future Victorian world and concerns this Victorian dandy who's also an escape artist and criminal. It's full of action, train crashes and stuff like that.

"Again, it was something I wanted to do, because people have developed certain preconceived notions about what I write. Now, I've been tagged 'The Weird Man of Comics,' and I wanted to do a couple of projects to show people that I can write action stuff as well."

Morrison is also drawn to a few of the Marvel heroes of his youth. "I would be interested in doing *Spider-Man*. I have some ideas, and we could always see what happens. I don't want to do the *Dark Knight* version of *Spider-Man*, or *Spider-Man: The Lost Years*; basically, I would like to do a really good *Spider-Man* story that goes back to the stuff I really enjoyed, which was the Steve Ditko *Spider-Man*, the quintessential version of the character."

Are there any other projects that he would still like to do? "Not within comics," Morrison admits. "I keep promising myself that I'll write a book. I know what it's going to be about, but I never get around to doing it. Within comics, I've done all the characters that I've wanted to do now, so I've lost that element of fanboy delight in getting hold of them. There's nothing that I would still like to do."

Asked if he still sees himself writing comic books 10 years from now, the weird man of comics shrugs his shoulders. "If I'm still alive," Grant Morrison says, "which I don't necessarily foresee. To me, comics aren't a stepping stone onto greater things. I wouldn't mind writing films or the great novel, but at the same time I would always want to do comics, because it's a medium that has its own strengths and areas of interest for me. I wouldn't abandon comics for something else." CS

Dent

(continued from page 24)

Dent's wife Norma (now retired and in her 90s) relaxes on their yacht.

"Lord, no!" he exclaims. "And remember, I didn't have Doc brought from another planet the way Superman was. I just had Doc reared and trained by scientists, that's all. I've never said Doc could jump over the Empire State Building the way Superman can. I just say Doc could build a 65-pound pocket-sized helicopter to get him over the Empire State Building. Scientists are working on such a gadget right now. I never have Doc use or do anything that isn't possible in the laboratory right now."

And was it always this way?

"Well, no. But after the flood of super-people, phantoms, batmen and such people that Doc started coming out of the cartoonists' and writers' ink-wells, my stomach kind of turned," Lester Dent says. "I've toned Doc down now to where he is not the slam-bang fire-eater he was. He still discovers strange tribes of people in the heart of one of the world's deserts, but he doesn't come across nations in the Earth's interior any more. There's another thing about Doc that I want you to note, too: *He has never left this planet*. No matter how much it handicaps him to stay here on Earth, he has never abandoned us and moved the scene of his operations to some other planet." CS

Doc Savage still remains, like his creator, a supreme adventurer in all parts of Earth, factual and fictional. CS

Dragon

(continued from page 48)

depend on the story, what comes up and how things present themselves. I'm not gonna do textbook-heavy teaching. I imagine there will be stories with some kind of depth, where I'll really want to get a message across. But there will be others where it's just people punching each other in the face. I'm not going to go out of my way to preach to people."

The Dragon will also be costumeless. "He adamantly refuses to wear spandex," Larsen quips. "There will never be a Dragon costume! He thinks that stuff is idiotic; he'll wear any kind of clothes—not that I'll be putting him in bellbottom pants again! He'll basically dress as I'll dress—a regular shirt and tie, a full cop's uniform, or a T-shirt and Bermuda shorts. I'm thinking of doing a bit where they design a costume for him, because they think he should have one. He'll give them a look, or try it on, look in a mirror and laugh."

Larsen's *Legends of the Dark Knight* story "probably won't happen." He's devoting his time to *The Savage Dragon*. But Larsen will eventually do *Nova*. "It has been sitting around beckoning, 'You must do me!' It has been approved, but I haven't been able to get to it. I'm not gonna draw it, but my friend Chris Marrinan will. His stuff is quirky, which I like. It has an unpredictability. Artists have fallen into the formula of no real surprises, but I'm always surprised by Chris. He thinks in a different way than me."

The year 1991 wasn't the best for Larsen. He lost his home to the big Oakland fire. "I was visiting [my girl friend's] brother and his family in Palo Alto, California. We were having a party, and I said, 'Let's turn on the TV and see if we can catch the football game.' There's the news, with police saying they blocked off the area where we live. When they showed the map of where the fire was, our place was in the middle. It burned to the ground, *nothing* left.

"I lost everything: My drawing table, 80 issues worth of comics I had drawn as a little kid, with the Dragon in it, my comics collection, my first drawings of Dragon and Spider-Man—*every* piece of artwork I had done with Spider-Man," he says sadly. "It was all gone. I miss the comics I did as a little kid most, and some photographs that aren't replaceable. Happily, we were fine, and it's just a matter of starting over."

Still, despite his heavy workload and personal tragedy, Larsen is most proud of his next accomplishment. "I'm getting married May 31!" he announces happily. "By the time your magazine comes out in June, my fiancee, Jannie Wong, will be my wife. She's great; I love her. It's a big hassle to be going through everything with insurance guys, talking to architects about rebuilding the house, getting work done on *The Dragon* and making wedding plans at the same time, but," Erik Larsen smiles, "I'm looking forward to the whole domestic scene!" CS

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Will Britain's classic SF newspaper strip *Dan Dare* fly as a TV series?

COMICS screen

All projects are live-action unless specified. Those boxed are new or updated since last listing. **Not everything listed will ultimately ever be made.** Legend: S: script; D: director; P: producer; AN: animated; LA: live-action; Syn: syndicated; HB: Hanna-Barbera; Nel: Nelvana; MWS: Murakami Wolf Swenson; RB: Rankin-Bass; WD: Disney; WB: Warner Bros.; PP: Paramount; U: Universal; Col: Columbia; FF: Funnybook Films. **Attn. all pros:** Info to be added to this list is cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 6th Flr., NY, NY 10016. (Info as of 5/20/92)

❑ **Addams Family.** Sequel. PP. AN series. Features John Astin's voice. ABC. HB. Fall.

The Airtight Garage. AN. S: Randy Loffician.

❑ **Aladdin.** AN film. WD. P/D/S: Ron Clements. John Musker. November '92.

Alias. Film. U. S: David S. Goyer. P: P. Lenkov. S. Daniel.

Alice in Wonderland. TV series. Disney Channel.

The American. Film. P: Joel Silver. S: Mark Verheiden.

American Flagg! Film.

❑ **American Tail.** AN Saturday a.m. TV series. *Fievel's American Tails.* Amblin. Nel./U. 13 episodes. Fall.

Animaniacs. AN syn TV. WB/Amblin. Fall '93.

Annie. Stage musical sequel. *Annie Warbucks.* Creators: Charnin, Meehan, Strouse.

Archie. LA Film. S: N. & D. Ephron. D: J. Schumacher. DIC.

Baby Huey. AN short. U. S: Bill Kopp.

Bad Baby. AN TV series. Imag.

❑ **Barbarella.** LA film. Nel.

Barbie. Film. Abrams/Gentile Ent. & Mattel.

❑ **Batman.** *Batman Returns.* Out. AN series. Fall. Fox.

Battletoads. TV pilot.

Beakman's World. Syn LA series. Based on *You Can with Beakman.* Col.

❑ **Bebe's Kids.** AN film. S: Reginald Hudlin. Hyperion/PP. Summer.

❑ **Beetlejuice.** AN series. Video & FBC. ABC series version scrapped. Film sequel.

❑ **The Black Cat.** Film. To star Sean Young (??!).

Blackhawk. Film. Amblin. S: Dan Aykroyd.

Blackman. Film.

Blade. Film. S: Lee Goldberg & Bill Rabkin.

Blinky Bill. Australian AN film. P: Yoram Gross. '92.

Blondie. Film. WB. P: Joel Silver.

James Bond. Syn AN series. *James Bond Jr.* MWS.

Bonkers D. Bobcat. Syn AN series. WD. Fall '93.

Boogiemanland. AN. Fox.

Brave Little Toaster. AN film sequel. Hyperion.

Bucky O'Hare. Syn AN.

Bugs Bunny. *Termite Terrace.* LA/AN film.

❑ **Capitol Critters.** AN. ABC. Cancelled.

Captain America. Film.

Captain Planet. AN series.

Casper. Film. Amblin.

Charlie Chan. Film. S/D: D. Mamet. P: Kirkwood. Hyde.

❑ **Chester Cheetah.** AN. Fox. Project cancelled.

Chicken Man. AN spoof series. Calico.

Classics Illustrated. AN series. DIC.

Cobalt 60. AN film.

Conan. *Conan the Adventurer.* Syn AN series. 13 episodes. Fall. Claster TV/Sunbow.

Concrete. Film. S: (D) L. Wilson. C. Thompson. P: Tim Burton.

Cool World. AN/LA film. PP. D: Ralph Bakshi. July.

The Crow. Film. S: John Shirley. D: Alex Proyce. P: Ed Pressman.

Crusader Rabbit. New AN series. In development. Fox.

Cyberpunk. Film. S: Steve Roberts. Imagination Factory.

❑ **Dan Dare.** TV series.

Danger Squad. Film. P/D: Leo Fong. W/D; P.R. Cable.

❑ **Darkwing Duck.** AN syn. ABC series. Renewed for fall.

Deathlok. Film.

❑ **Dennis the Menace.** Film. P/S: John Hughes. D: Patrick Johnson. WB. Summer '93 release. *Dennis the Musical.* S: E. Chambers. Music: Jeff Church. Lyrics: R. Enquist. Chambers. Fall '92?

Dinosaurs for Hire. AN series. In development. Fox.

Dr. Off. Film. Black superhero spoof. P: Tim Reid.

Dr. Strange. Film. Zoetrope. D: Alex Cox. P: F. Coppola.

❑ **Dr. Who.** AN series version. Nel.

Doug. AN. Nickelodeon.

❑ **Duckman.** AN pilot. Based on Everett Peck comic. Klasky Csupo.

Dudley Do-Right. Film. PP.

Eek the Cat. AN. Fox. D: Savage Steve Holland. Nel. Fall.

Elfquest. Film/TV. Abby Lou Prod. Freedom Distrib.

Evangeline. Film. FF.

Family Dog. AN series. CBS. Amblin/Nel. Debut delayed.

❑ **Fantastic Four.** Film. EP: Stan Lee. D: Max Kleven. Constantin Film. May be a musical (??).

Far Side. AN TV.

❑ **Fearless Fosdick.** AN film. Nel.

Fish Police. AN series. HB. CBS. Likely cancellation.

The Flintstones. Film. Fred: John Goodman. D: Richard Donner. U/Amblin. AN TV films. S: J. Romano.

❑ **Garfield.** AN series. Renewed for fall.

G.I. Joe. Film. S: Anthony & John Gentile. WB.

❑ **Goofy.** Syn AN series *Goof Troop.* WD. Premieres fall. Also Saturday a.m. series version.

The Green Arrow. TV. P: Danny Bilson. Paul DeMeo.

The Green Hornet. Film. S: D. Mancini. P: D. Kirschner. U.

❑ **Gus & Grizzard.** AN pilot. Creator: Gary K. Wolf. Nel. CBS.

Hopalong Cassidy. Film. S: G. Popper. J. Rosenthal.

❑ **Human Target.** Series. ABC. R. Springfield. P: D. Bilson. P. De Meo. L. Lyttle. Premieres summer.

Inspector Gadget. New AN TV series. DIC.

❑ **Iron Man.** Film. Universal dropped it. (see article)

Jo Jo. Film. P: Lee Caplin. S: Mike Chapman.

Jonny Quest. AN TV movie. HB. X-Mas.

Judge Dredd. Film. Fox. P: C. Lippincott, Ed Pressman.

Li'l Abner. TV. P: Max & Micheline Keller.

❑ **Little Mermaid.** AN prequel TV series. Fall. CBS. WD.

Little Nemo. AN film. TMS Ent./Hemdale. Summer.

Lone Wolf & Cub. Film. D: John Bruno. P: Ed Pressman. S: Bill Wisher.

Lucky Luke. TV series.

Terence Hill. SB Comm.

Mai the Psychic Girl. Film. D: Tim Burton. S: L. Wilson. C. Thompson. P: Burton. Wilson.

D. Di Novi. W. Hill. Carolco.

Mandrake. Film.

The Mask. Film. New Line.

The Meteor Man. Film. S/D: R. Townsend.

Mr. X. Film. P: Jim Cash & Jack Epps Jr.

Monster High My Pocket. AN. HB. ABC. S: Glenn Leopold.

❑ **Mother Goose & Grimm.** Renewed for fall. Retitled *Grimmy.* CBS.

Nancy. Film. P: P. Muller.

Neil the Horse. AN/LA.

Ninja High School. AN video. U.K. Sun Planning.

Once Upon a Forest. AN film. Fox/HB. '93 release.

❑ **Joe Palooka.** TV movie/pilot. Viacom. NBC. P: Dean Hargrove.

Papazzzi Samurai. AN TV series. P: DIC. Abrams/Gentile.

Peanuts. AN TV & film.

The Phantom. Film. PP. P: B. Sherlock. P. Sjoquist, J. Torv. R. Price. S: K. Shadie. Lee Falk. con. D: S. Wincer.

Pico & Columbus. AN film. Bavaria Film.

❑ **Pirates of Dark Water.** AN series. Joins *Funtastic World of Hanna-Barbera* with new segments this fall. Sat a.m. series cancelled.

Power Pack. TV pilot. S: J. Brett. N World/Paragon.

Plastic Man. Film. WB/Amblin. S: Larry Wilson.

❑ **Prince Valiant.** AN series. Family Chan. Renewed for 39 more episodes. LA Film. S: M. Beckner. Constantin Film. P: B. Eichinger. J. Gorman.

Radio Boy. AN. RB.

❑ **Red Sonja.** TV. Lancit Media Prod.

Reid Fleming. Film. S: creator David Boswell. P: M. Weisman, J. Loeb II.

❑ **Ren & Stimpy.** AN. Nickelodeon. (see article)

Richie Rich. Film. P: J. Silver. J. Davis. S: Neil Tolkin.

RoboCop 3. S: Frank Miller & Fred Dekker (D). Summer?

❑ **Roger Rabbit.** Prequel film. *Who Discovered Roger Rabbit.* Shelved. WD. New short "Trail Mix Up."

Rogue Trooper. Film. D: Peter Hewitt. P: Joel Silver.

Rugrats. AN. Nickelodeon.

Rupert the Bear. AN. Nel.

The Saint. Film. S: Terry Hayes. D: Kenny Harlin. P: Robert Evans. PP.

❑ **Sandman.** Film.

Scooby Doo. Film. WB.

Secret Agent X-9. AN film.

Sgt. Kabukiman. AN series. Troma. DIC.

Sgt. Rock. Film. P: Joel Silver. Bob Zemeckis. WB.

The Shadow. Film. S: David Koepp. P: Martin Bregman. U.

The She-Hulk. Film. S/D: Larry Cohen. B. Nielsen.

The Silver Surfer. Film. EP: Stan Lee. Constantin Film.

The Simpsons. AN. FBC.

Speed Racer. Film. S: (D) Patrick Johnson. John Lau. P: J. Silver. R. Donner. WB. '93?

Spider-Man. Film. D: Jim Cameron. Carolco. Stage musical. S & lyrics: B. Harman. Music: K. Herrmann. EXP: Stan Lee. D: J. Nash. J. Calamari.

❑ **Starwatcher.** AN film. P: Alain Gulot/Videosystem. EP: Ridley Scott. S: Moebius & J. Fryszman. D: Moebius. Keith Ingham. (see this page)

Superboy. Syn TV.

Super-Dave. AN. DIC.

Superman. *Superman: The New Movie.* S: Mark Jones & Gary Bates. To lense in FL.

❑ **Super Mario Bros.** LA film. S: Barry Morrow. D: Rocky Morton. Annabel Jankel. Shooting this summer.

Swamp Thing. TV. USA.

Tales from the Crypt. HBO.

Tales from the Hart. TV. P: Aaron Spelling.

Tarzan. Syn TV series.

❑ **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.** LA sequel shoots this summer for Easter '93. S/D: Stuart T. Gillard. AN series. CBS. Syn.

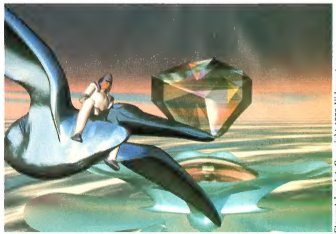
Time Beavers. AN TV series. Kushner-Locke.

Time Cop. Film. D: Sam Raimi.

Tintin. AN series. HBO.

Tom & Jerry. An film. P/D: Phil Roman. Spring '93.

Toxic Crusaders. LA film.



Starwatcher Art: Copyright 1992 Videosystem

The incredible imagination of Moebius comes alive through computer animation in *Starwatcher*.

Troma/New Line.

Trouble with Girls. Film. Fox/FF. S: W. Jacobs. G. Jones. P: M. Pepler. N. Tabachnick.

Ultraman. TV series.

Valentina. TV series. Dementra Hampton. Reteitalia.

Vampirella. Film. S/D: Jim Wynorski.

V for Vendetta. Film. WB. S: Hilary Henkin.

Watchmen. Film. P: J. Silver. D: T. Gilliam. Largo.

We're Back. AN film. Amblin London/U. Fall '93.

Why I Hate Saturn. TV.

Wild Cards. Film. Disney. S: George R.R. Martin. P: Michael Engelberg.

Wizard of Id. Film. Cinergi.

Wolverine. Film.

Woof. AN/LA TV pilot. ABC/TriStar.

The X-Men. AN TV series. Fox. Fall. Marvel/Saban. Film. Carolco. P: Jim Cameron.

Zen. Film. AN series.

❑ **Zorro.** Film. D: Steven Spielberg. S: Nancy Larson. TriStar. TV series. 13 new episodes. Family Chan.

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